



PRINCIPLES OF  
*Shakespearian Production*

WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE  
TO THE TRAGEDIES

BY

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PENGUIN BOOKS  
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## PREFACE

SINCE the publication of this study in 1936, my stage work has included *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Macbeth*. As theories of production cannot be independent of the art, and instinct, of acting, it seems worth recording that I have had the experience of playing the central parts in these and the other productions examined in this book, with the exception of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Henry VIII*. To these may be added my Shakespearian selections given during the war under the title *This Sceptred Isle*, first in collaboration with Miss Nancy Price at the Tavistock Theatre (London) and later at various country centres, culminating in my work at the Westminster Theatre in the summer of 1941, when the late Henry Ainley emerged from his retirement to lend me his valued support. At one performance we had the additional honour of a contribution by the late Sir John Martin Harvey. I like to set on record this direct contact with that greater theatre which has, from the start, inspired my efforts in the lesser

The two concluding essays are new. For the rest, the original text is reprinted with a minimum of alteration, mainly deletions. Where an idea of any importance is added, I have dated it.

From my original preface I would preserve this remark on the work of Herbert Beerbohm Tree: 'If today we differ from his principles, we have nevertheless scrapped one great tradition without creating another. Tree was an artist, and a great one. The richness and dignity which the Shakespearian play, especially Shakespearian tragedy, demands in presentation, died with him. For at His Majesty's you attended always something beyond entertainment, of ceremonial grandeur and noble, if extravagant, artistry', together with Mr C. B. Purdom's generous comment on my Rudolf Steiner *Hamlet*: 'I appreciate the difficulties



under which you were working, but your performance of *Hamlet* certainly gave me an entirely new impression. You unfolded a spiritual significance revealed in no other production I have ever seen.

I would again record my debt, as an actor, to many years of advice and encouragement from the late Leslie Harris

G W K.

Leeds-Exmouth, 1947

*P S* - I regret not having been able to include any substantial description of the productions of *Timon of Athens* referred to in my note on p 181. On this central work there is, from the stage viewpoint, so much to say that it seemed wisest to postpone my account.

A note on 'Drama and the University' is appended by kind permission of *The University of Leeds Review*. It is a great pleasure to know that Mr G B Purdom has himself a study on Shakespearian production in the press.

Exmouth, 1949

# I

## THE SHAKESPEARIAN PLAY

I HAVE for some time been contending that a Shakespearian play is not purely and only a good story with entertainment and dramatic value linked to profound analysis of character<sup>1</sup> and a heart-thrilling rhetoric, but that, over and above all this, it presents a close mesh of imaginative and intellectual suggestion demanding a more exact study and sensitive appreciation than it has so far received. The persons in the play are vital and human, none more so, but the interaction of those persons within the dramatic texture of the whole, and that texture itself, the action, movement and purpose of the whole artistic pattern, must at each instant be kept in mind. From such a comprehension many old difficulties are quickly resolved: what was inexplicable is found necessary, what suspected as spurious, seen as crucial. The Graveyard scene in *Hamlet* has been called irrelevant, and modern scholarship still repudiates the Vision in *Cymbeline* – regularly omitted from stage productions – and considers *Henry VIII* a chaotic play of doubtful authorship. There is no longer need or excuse for such confusion, for the powerfully dramatic Vision fits as perfectly into the pattern of *Cymbeline* as the Graveyard scene into that of *Hamlet*, and *Henry VIII* is a carefully constructed and fine play whose pattern I have elsewhere analysed.

Whereas from the old and limited understanding the

1 My previous animadversions as to 'character' come under two distinct headings: (i) a refusal to analyse any person in the drama in isolation from the whole play and its various actions and effects, (ii) an antipathy to the term 'character' in the sense of 'fictional person' because of certain dangerous ethical associations. It is not always understood that neither of these objections precludes intense concern with the subtle psychology and richly human action of which the plays are made.

was slight justification for the long and still living tradition of Shakespearian idolatry, from the new and comprehensive sight novel splendours of the intellect and themes of profundity and universal grandeur continually and pleasingly emerge. We ought not at all to be surprised at this, still less should we be offended. We are used to regarding great poetry as of universal importance, with meanings not limited to the partial and ephemeral. But Shakespeare has somehow stood alone, and for too long, as a solitary figure of irrelevant magnitude. True, we cannot interpret the whole of Shakespeare, nor of Dante, nor Byron. But because we can never exhaust the meanings in a great poet, that gives us no authority to neglect what meanings patently are there. Faced with a plenitude of meanings, we have asserted none: it is an easy way out. We must no longer deny to Shakespeare a quality common to great literature: the quality of universal meanings in the particular event. For Shakespeare has something to say not only about human life, but about death, not only about England, or Venice, but the universe. It is generally denied that Shakespeare is a religious poet. But the religion of great poetry is seldom housed in direct and emphasized anthropomorphism: poetry is by nature non-theological. Watch even Dante's varied periphrases for 'God', or Milton's avoidance of dramatic stress on the supreme being. *The Hound of Heaven* works, like Jesus himself, by metaphor and parable. Poetry is metaphoric, its essential purpose to blend the human and the divine. So those poets who aim primarily to speak of God, do so in terms of man, and Shakespeare, speaking with the accents and intricacies of great poetry of man, speaks accordingly of God. 14480/1911

[The Shakespearian play shows a close-inwoven texture of personal thinking with some objective and pre-existent story. Philosophy is entwined with action and event. Shakespeare's philosophy is infinitely variable, not static, as Dante's *King Lear* may be Senecan, but *Macbeth* is Christian. His philosophy may vary within one play. You cannot,

therefore ever find by abstraction Shakespeare's 'own' philosophy of life his massed statement includes many philosophies, but is subject to none Any one play is properly extra-dimensional to philosophic thought *Macbeth* is, as it were, a solid of which the length may be a Holinshed story but the height a Christian philosophy of grace and evil, and the breadth Shakespeare's own emotional experience Criticism, aware of the two-dimensional nature of the philosophic intelligence, often asserts that such imaginative solids are uninterpretable Which is nevertheless an error, since a Shakespearian play, though it may be complex, is yet far less so than life itself, which the philosophic intelligence has invariably considered a fair quarry To apply intelligence to the whole art-form is not the same as abstracting from it those elements only that seem intelligible There is, indeed, no excuse for mental inaction What happened was really this criticism came to an impasse Those elements in Shakespeare it was accustomed to analyse were, certainly, all but exhausted by analysis as when tunnellers come to a nasty piece of rock A little dynamite, however, may open out new progress So, by attending as well to imagery and symbolism as to thought and action, to the rhythmic curves of poetry as well as to 'character', we touch the richer dimensional quality of the Shakespearian creation That does not mean that we now attend only to those elements passed over before, rather that we attend afresh to the whole pattern I have not, in my own interpretations, neglected to analyse persons or events but I have taken them together with, and in terms of, the whole.

(From such interpretations you become aware of the dominating Shakespearian themes, of love and hate, warriorship, kingship, ideas of state-order, conflicts of life-forces and death-forces, patterns of romance-fulfilment and the tragic sacrifice, and difficult visions that go farther yet.) My two most important results I take to be (1) the discovery of tempests and music as dominant contrasted sym-

bolic impressions throughout the whole, or nearly the whole, of Shakespeare, and (ii) my reading of the Final Play as visions of immortality crowning Shakespeare's work and to be given as serious attention in their peculiar quality as *Macbeth* and *King Lear* in theirs. Though general acceptance of my contentions is not as yet apparent, it will come, if not soon, then late. Critics are sometimes, quite naturally, alienated by novelty and tend to read into vividness of statement a rigidity and schematism which are not necessarily implicit. To safeguard my essay from misunderstanding I next shortly outline what I take to be the nature of a Shakespearean play, using a succession of simple headings: (i) How it was made, (ii) What it is, (iii) What it does, and (iv) How it does it. These are chosen to prepare the way directly for my ideas on production. The formulation of scientific stage principles follows logically from any understanding of Shakespeare's positive and challenging significance.

# I HOW IT WAS MADE

In answering this question we must avoid a limited exactitude. What we mean by Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was not caused solely by Elizabethan stage conditions, by Shakespeare's own experience of the terrors of a guilty conscience, by any one person or any number of persons he had met and observed, by a story, or stories, from Holinshed; nor by a desire for box-office receipts, nor in order to please Burbage with a good part. Probably all contributed. There is nothing strange in that: there are as many contributory causes for the writing of this book. Any act, artistic or otherwise, is poised into existence on a scaffolding of numberless convergencies.

Shakespeare was a literary and dramatic artist working in terms of stage technique. He was, moreover, a man of spiritual sensibility with a keen and able mind. By the time he wrote *Macbeth* he was fairly sure of his public. Lately he had been turning out tragedies and writing more powerfully than ever. He now feels like attempting a darker tragedy than any before.

Turning over some favourite authors he comes across an old Scottish story. The name 'Macbeth' thrills him. It rhymes with death. Another play will be needed shortly to act before the new King from Scotland. A Scottish play would be apt. Moreover, the Scottish setting, with its weird and Gaelic associations, the deep-sunk legends and superstitions that cling to lonely glens and mist-scarfed hills, all appeal to him. He begins to feel his play as a quality, it takes colour and some vague proportion in the womb of his mind. This play will deal with black, abysmal, and supernatural evil.

But for the very setting it suggests the story of Macbeth is unsuitable. Macbeth killed the King of Scotland openly, a declared rebel, whereas what is wanted is a central act essentially dishonourable, dastardly, and unforgivable. Something that would keep you awake at night. He turns over the pages of Holinshed and decides to borrow the crime of Macdonwald and fuse it to his story. Then why not call the play *Macdonwald*? No, that would never sound so well. 'The play is to be *Macbeth*' he is sure of it. And it is, to be more intense, more soaked in horror of blood, more abysmal in its soundings, than any play his public has seen. They are still drawn to tragedies of blood which is fortunate, since his tragic genius has more work to do. But even if they were not, at this stage in his career, he would not care. His imagination is now powerfully at work, a hound at the scent.

There is one difficulty. Julius Caesar was killed grandly on the stage, and the scene was a great success. This murder must be more powerful still, yet somehow no sort of open and active assassination will be so sickeningly evil and nightmarish as his vague idea demands. But action is his usual medium, visible action. His idea demands, it would seem, a dramatic loss which, he has long ago discovered, must be impossible, since the two are not properly distinct. There must be a solution. He remembers how heavy the atmosphere of evil is to be the Scottish and Celtic twilight

of it, the mystery and supernature, the very mystery of evil and then sees how the crime will be ten times more powerful with a mysterious and spiritual darkness, if done on stage. Vague impressions float before him: an au-drawn dagger, questions, fear, the shrieking owl, knocking at the gate. Why, the thing is half-way toward completion. It has the central act and dominant tone: something like those nightmares that racked him ten years ago when he was writing happy plays and everybody thought him so merry. He can still hardly bear the memory, even now sometimes corpses nod over his bed at midnight. Yes, but he will have his revenge, make the action of his new play present a living nightmare, and once and for all pillory those tortures of the mind in poetry.

As he writes, old images and thoughts from *The Spanish Tragedy* and his own *Henry VI* and *Lucrece* cluster in his mind. He uses all past impressions that fit. He doesn't search for them, but knows they will come, racing like filings to a magnet, all he has ever seen or heard that fits the *Macbeth* idea. *Richard III* is built into his new play, and the Queen's forebodings in *Richard II*. The pattern of *Julius Caesar* is closely followed. And all the time he is drawing, too, on past emotional experiences of his private life. His Elizabethan sense of kingship and the necessity of order in the state, his terror of anarchy, play their part. Unconscious and conscious elements bind and fuse together. As for stage-technique, this is instinctive and mostly unconscious: he thinks and creates inevitably in terms of it. He will not forget to so arrange his short and long scenes that one can be played while the other is being set. He hears Burbage's voice, and stage thunder crashes in his mind: drums, larums, hautboys sound. These are his meiest grammar, but two things trouble him.

He has never gone in much for flattery: but this is a special occasion. The newly crowned King James was King of Scotland before coming to England. And he is, as it happens, an authority on witchcraft. Holinshed's three Weir-

Women had therefore better be developed. Yes, they will be important as the Ghost in *Hamlet*. Creatures of evil, the Greek Furies. Just what he wants, anyway. How curiously it all works in together. But how to please King James with some more obvious flattery? He certainly mustn't be allowed to think this play a satire on Scottish monarchs which would never do. And there's another point. How, in so tense and whirling a drama as this, to give Burbage a rest after the middle action? He is beginning to insist on this nowadays and made a great fuss about *Othello*, in spite of Desdemona's Willow-song. Possibly to kill two birds with one stone. But how? To have another king somewhere, and a change of scene. England, necessarily. They can go there for aid, and give Burbage his rest. Without knowing precisely why, he suddenly recalls Holinshed's description of Edward the Confessor's miraculous powers. The very thing to contrast with the evil-tormented Macbeth, tone with other suggestions of divine grace, and give him a chance of flattery about the powers of healing to be handed down to future kings of England. How strangely to the point these things turn out. And what was that about future kings? The phrase worries him, something crying for attention. Future kings? Yes, of course, he will make it very clear that Macbeth is not ancestor to a line of Scottish Kings either. Banquo's descendants will be glorified. Another fine philosophic and poetic contrast, and a reference to the future union of the two realms. Two-fold balls and treble sceptres.

His artistic conscience, however, is never for one moment relaxed. He alters, selects, blends, copies, borrows, and so on, and for divers reasons. But each and all are, in the very instant of adoption, coloured and moulded by a single dominant and unwavering purpose. Possibly he can't say exactly what that purpose is. The manager, perhaps, tells him that a certain long passage by a gentlewoman describing Lady Macbeth's mental disintegration isn't fair on the boy who acts the leading lady. Why not show Lady Macbeth's pain in action? Shakespeare thinks for a second



imaginative significance, rejecting all oblique and subsidiary causes I do not stop at every moment to observe that *Macbeth* and *King Lear* were meant to be acted. Not that I am ignorant of this, but that I was never in doubt of it. It is the same with a producer: concentration on the 'dramatic construction' is not enough. Unless he gets the idea behind the construction, he is impotent. Certainly, you must always read with something of an eye for necessary compression of action and character-condensation, which is also often true of an epic or novel. But the dramatic medium need never preclude our sight of an intellectual profundity: indeed, it should assist. So we will not be put off our stroke because a play, Shakespearian or otherwise, was meant to be acted. You might as well hold up the interpretation of *Paradise Lost* by saying it was meant to be read.

In the final artistic meaning only such things exist for attention as an ideal spectator may be supposed to receive from an ideal performance. In such a spectator's mind issues will not be raised concerning the play's composition. He will not be busy subtracting passages from Plutarch from the completed *Antony and Cleopatra*, while giving the remainder an extra degree of interest as being 'Shakespeare's own'. To use again my favourite analogy: a man in the wings of a theatre, though he may see more of the works, cannot get the producer's precise message as well as a spectator in the dress circle. He views from a wrong angle, fine effects are masked, grouping becomes meaningless, and a host of irrelevances interrupt attention – an anxious stage-manager, a bored prompter, a phlegmatically chewing stage-hand watching Cleopatra die, the wiles and spare flats and hanging floods all distract. Similarly, to know that Shakespeare had to get bodies off the stage at the end is not constituent to a refined spectator's artistic pleasure (which includes intellectual sensibility) during the grand ceremonial of a Shakespearian conclusion. Or rather it ought not to be. It may before now have made a university professor happy to think of this whilst listening to Fortinbras

or Caesar, but, if so, it was, I fear, an illegitimate and naughty enjoyment

## 2 WHAT IT IS

What, then, is this final result? Primarily, an aural time-sequence, like music a sequence of impressions, thoughts and images, carried across mainly by audible words allotted to various fictional persons. To these we must add sound-effects such as alarms, trumpets, thunder and music. Visual details concerning the action are not emphasized, as a rule, by stage-direction, except in the latest group of plays, and then only with moderation. It is true that the text is often itself richly descriptive but these are pictures within the spoken word, so to speak. That which builds the essential *Macbeth*, which persists common to various readings and stage-performances, is outwardly at least aural, not visual, though, as with music, the aural can be received by the ear of imagination in silent reading.

But through this medium various things are got across. There are conceptual thoughts, ideas. There are also mind-pictures. Shakespeare is crammed with visual impressions, a chain of them, blending one into another very often. We do not visualize them at all clearly at a first performance or a first reading, but they are there nevertheless at the back of the words, semi-consciously received. From this flux of ideas and images emerge greater units: the developing persons of the drama, the action and general movement, the marshalling of forces of one sort or another. The play is expressly dynamic, not static. This is true of all Shakespeare's plays, out of his tragedies especially. Compared with a drama of more classical tradition the Shakespearian tragedy is simply crammed with action. You get from it a sense of intense life in conflict, development, and movement. Whatever Shakespeare is doing, one thing is clear: he does it largely through the medium of action. That is why Hamlet's passivity is so laughable. See how *Richard III* is crammed tumultuously with tremendous events: even for Shakespeare they are ex-

cessive If we grant that Shakespeare expresses profundities, then we must be prepared to see those profundities expressed in terms of intense dramatic activity Partly from this derives his irresistible vitality and unanswerable impact Each play is an onslaught on the mind And action implies conflict We watch fierce contestants, men or principles The 'principles' of the middle scenes usually become opposing armies towards the end, the inner psychological disturbance tends to objectify itself as the play unfurls into open military opposition Observe how often armies are brought on the stage, sometimes actually fighting, and how individual combats may be crucial to the plot, as in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* These are surface symptoms of what is always embedded deep in Shakespeare the play's significant action

The Shakespearian movement, whether of a whole play, or a scene, or a speech, undulates it shows a rhythmic rise and fall There are vast waves of action, and, within each, subtler minute crests and cusps, a ceaseless rippling variation

You may get a sense of speed-waves The middle action of *Hamlet* starts with a long scene of ordinary conversation The player's speech whips up the action for awhile, then it falls back, but not right back, towards the poignant intensity of Hamlet's meeting with Ophelia Then we have Hamlet's address to the players, working up shortly to the play scene From now on the speed increases rapidly The King flies, Hamlet's answers snap back at Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the King's agonized prayer swiftly follows, and Hamlet's entry, and Hamlet's interview with his mother This interview starts with a rapid dialogue leading to Polonius' death There is a pause, Hamlet settles down to his purpose, the movement is deliberate, but quickly gains speed as Hamlet loses control, he grows more wild and volleys abuse, the action gathers, rises to a climax, and the Ghost enters The Ghost's appearance checks the whole movement that started with the Play scene Hamlet is now

limp, his bolt shot, the Queen too the whole action is limp. The scene drags on like a wounded snake, with repetitions an intentional anti-climax Shakespeare's art functions in terms of rising action followed by a fall He never fears an anti-climax It is all done with curves, like a line of undulating hills After a fall there is continuation he never cuts off his action at a precipice

The tragedies often rise to a crest of action about Act III, then, with variations, descend <sup>1</sup> *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Timon of Athens* do this *Othello*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* rise to a later climax but the play does not close till the action is well completed and rounded off <sup>2</sup> You get a pattern of the turning wheel of events, the rhythm and leverage of life swinging over You find it in individual speeches at a high moment, the words gather power, rise, maintain their height, then, wavering, sough back <sup>3</sup> Remember that grand moment in *Richard II* when lyrical Richard, brought before Bolingbroke, starts humbly, then grows swiftly in spiritual stature, takes on the tragic purple of dethroned kingship and sears his enemies with white-hot speech

Indeed, the whole development of Richard to this moment repays careful attention He is first just weak, spoilt, careless and cruel, just like Marlowe's Edward II But this, almost the whole of Marlowe's protagonist, is the merest beginning of Shakespeare's Richard Coming back from

1 Or so it seems to us today But the military conflicts that the modern producer and audience find it so hard to take seriously were probably far more important to an Elizabethan, and as nerve racking, probably, as the sound effects in *Journey's End* to us

2 Contrast Marlowe's technique in *Faustus* Except for the very short epilogue, the play is cut off abruptly at an especially violent climax Marlowe is always interested in his heroes mainly as individuals, Shakespeare in the hero's relation to life in general

3 Compare *2 Henry IV*, III, 1, 18-25, from 'Wilt thou ' to ' itself awakes ' The surges pile up steadily to the word 'clouds,' and then fall back for the line following This is a typical unit See *Macbeth*'s 'If it were done ' soliloquy, how it rises to a climax, and sinks for the last four lines

Ireland he addresses the earth of England in words that recapture some of our sympathy and, above all, create in us a new sense of Richard's sacred office. His confidence in that blackens Bolingbroke with a single phrase. Disaster closes on him and his tragic despair is so developed that he becomes before our eyes unearthly, prince of a new world, a saint in sorrow. But still he is England's King, never more so. His words to Northumberland pile phrase on damning phrase that leave his enemies, spiritually, crushed before they start to win. Then again he reverts to saintly meditation. They go to London. But watch what is happening: he is not falling, but rising. Step by step he climbs his miniature Calvary. At last he is to resign his crown. He does so, humbly. Northumberland would next have him read a record of his misdeeds. Now watch how the words gather strength.

K. RICHARD. Must I do so? and must I rave out  
 My weaved up folly? Gentle Northumberland,  
 If thy offences were upon record  
 Would it not shame thee in so fair a troop  
 To read a lecture of them? If thou would'st,  
 There should'st thou find one heinous article  
 Containing the deposing of a King  
 And cracking the strong warrant of an oath,  
 Mark'd with a blot, damned in the book of Heaven,  
 Nay, all of you that stand and look upon me,  
 Whilst that my wretchedness doth bait myself,  
 Though some of you with Pilate wash your hands  
 Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates  
 Have here delivered me to my sour cross,  
 And water cannot wash away your sin.

Observe the references to Christ. Here Richard towers over them all in spiritual stature, king yet, the elected of God. The scene rises to a climax at 'Containing the deposing' down to 'damned in the book of Heaven', and then drops, but with a returning and only slightly lesser crest, soon after. It is all done with varied modulation, waves, curves. And after this scene you have Richard's parting with his wife, deep in the luxuriating sunset of sorrow, his medita-

tive listening to music in prison, his death. Observe how the climax comes well before the end and the movement curves over

This spiritual rise under tragic stress you get often enough: the same happens with Romeo, Hamlet (towards the end of the play), Lear, and Cleopatra. Shakespeare continually surprises not by remarkable events alone, but by revealing a continual and growing power in his persons. Each is conceived according to the principle of growth, each tragedy is a rise. Marlowe's Edward satisfies your expectation, Shakespeare's Richard shatters it, revealing strength where you expected weakness. Marlowe's tragedy gives you a study of a failure, Shakespeare's a revelation of grandeur. Even the conclusion to *Faustus* presents rather a sublime wriggling than a sacrificial suffering. Marlowe's tragic heroes are all ambitious materialists, and when they crash, they end. Shakespeare's are purgatorial pilgrims. Shakespeare is fundamentally Christian, Marlowe pagan. For a Shakespearian tragedy has always direction and a positive thrust. In developing his persons, in constructing a play, in writing a speech, Shakespeare is master of the seventh wave, crash follows crash, and when you expect exhaustion, and fear, after so much expense of power, a comparatively limp conclusion, the seventh wave towers up, something you have never guessed yet recognize as inevitable, and not till then, the return, the vast retraction, and silence.

That Shakespeare's two dominant symbols are aural effects is not therefore strange. As I have argued at great length, the Shakespearian universe turns about the axis of tempests and music. True, many of the tempests are given visual though verbal description, but many, too, are presented in stage-directions of thunder. A Shakespearian tragedy is 'full of sound and fury': the action demands often flourishes, trumpets, drums, alarums, cannon, sounds which bridge the two opposites of music and thunder. In terms of music and tempest we can discover a certain recurrent pattern in tragedy: some sort of music near the beginning,

suggesting peace, followed by the thunder of disrupting action and conflict about Act III, a falling back to a dark serenity and melodious pathos, with often more music, usually in some way a broken music, in Act IV or thereabouts, and then the final tragic impact, usually after an armed conflict, often with stately martial sounds (as in *Hamlet*, *Timon*, *Coriolanus*) at the close, which martial sounds may always be considered to blend the two antinomies of pure music and tempest-thunder <sup>1</sup>

All these are merest samples. There is much more that might be said. To different minds different rhythmic variations will be apparent. And I have left unnoticed the romantic Comedies, where the persons are on the whole more static, and a musical and harmonious resolution is played out with some sort of tempest and division in the background, and also the Final Plays, where you start with pure tragedy, and get a sudden reversal towards union and peace. The subject is inexhaustible. Plays may often be considered as three – or four – vast waves of action, with intervals between. The usual act and scene headings are no use as guides, you must discover rhythms independently. It is a good plan to think of the play as a cinematograph sequence: short scenes are not technically weak in Shakespeare. You may get a flashed view of one army, then the other, then again the first, which gives a sense of speed and action. But the order may also be most important: fine effects are gained by juxtaposition, as when Buckingham's execution follows Wolsey's feast and the King's merry-making. There are a myriad subtleties in all this. There is no looseness in the interlinked sequence and each link in the chain is the more massive for each and all that precede it. The play gathers power as it moves. It is more than an addition. It increases like compound interest. Tragedy becomes a

<sup>1</sup> This pattern characterizes Shakespeare's work as a whole, from the early romances, through tragedy and the mysticism of the Final Plays, to *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare's last play corresponding to the politico-ritualistic conclusions of *Hamlet* and *Timon of Athens* (1947).

massive swelling river thundering into a serene and peaceful sea Shakespeare, remember, does not fear an anticlimax And the temporal sequences in Shakespeare build something beyond the temporal, its crashing and mighty rhythms raise an architecture surpassing speech For, though the play be 'full of sound and fury', it is very far from 'signifying nothing'

#### WHAT IT DOES

So it will not follow that we are excused from exact analysis of imagery, symbol, and thought Though a speech be a sound-sequence, it will not sound well unless the speaker has some degree of understanding Similarly a whole play will not move well unless the producer realizes a lot more than the general rhythmic succession of big sounds We have stressed the importance of varied movement and rhythmic undulations, but this very variety and rhythm depend ultimately on meaning of various kinds, and the meanings, once you start on them, are most subtle and comprehensive

But, you may say, the plays were meant to be acted, and even an ideal spectator can at any one performance receive only a general sense of story and grand action Yet that general sense may be taken to include an awareness of every word that has been said during the performance, of everything that preceded in its interrelation with everything else That is why one experience of a great work is not enough, we must grow to know it Shakespeare, like the Greek dramatists, preferred plots not entirely new to his audience, for the early scenes should gain power from some knowledge of what is to come Ideally the whole play should be semi-consciously in the mind at every separate moment of it The final result will be a massed *aïca* of the mind, rather spatial than temporal which spatiality nevertheless includes the gathering power and rhythms of a sequence It is therefore both spatial and temporal

As your knowledge of a Shakespearian play increases you



become more and more intensely aware of a certain quality peculiar to it. This can be held in the mind even after the events which help to build it are forgotten, indeed, the ability to leave such an impression is the distinguishing mark of high imaginative literature. This quality, though mental, is to the inward eye partly at least visual, spatial, an expanse. The action of *Macbeth* will leave you a sense of certain imaginative areas. You will see darkness and colour. There is rich gold of kingship, crowns of sovereignty, ingots of world-power: the poetry emphasizes them, the events build them. Red blood streams, sticks on the hand. Nature's innocence is in the martlet's nest, the tree borne by the crowned Child, Birnam wood. Images of divine grace are frequent. Night-birds wing the air. Thunder crashes and lightning's scimitars of flame gash the darkness. Feasting, whether in state as with Duncan and later Banquo's Ghost, or as suggested negatively in the horror of the Weird Sisters' cauldron-stew of filth, is powerful. So varied impressions may be allowed to group themselves into a new kind of *dramatis personae* of symbolic suggestion. Those I have just noticed tend to divide into two camps of life-forces and death-forces which clearly relates to the main action. This is how you may approach the more universal meanings of a Shakespearian play in terms of certain sense-suggestions thrown up and built in the mind by the story, its persons, and their words.

I have been criticized for selecting cross-sections of imaginative correspondence – such as the kingship, crown and sceptre references in *Macbeth* – without close reference at every instant to their peculiar contexts and order of sequence in the play. But we are analysing the final effect of the whole play in an ideal recipient's mind, or that which may be attained by anyone after continual study. In this whole result every part is co-existent though built of a sequence: it is a sequence whose nature and end is to accumulate itself swiftly into that whole. Every effect has a simultaneous reference to its own context and to the whole. To

attempt to work along the time-surface of particular contexts with each minute correspondence, showing how this in its context throws back to that and forward to something else in theirs, and to continue doing this, may involve subtleties and intricacies of doubtful value, and even of doubtful honesty, since you would never be able to start doing this on any wide scale without an already formed knowledge of the massed existence of such references without implications of sequence

You can thus start to know the whole play, action and atmosphere, time-sequence and symbols, as a single, almost – but never quite – visual quality, built equally of action and sense-suggestions. Notice how the main action is often crystallized into some symbolic solidity, such as the three Apparitions in *Macbeth*, the handkerchief in *Othello*, the caskets in *The Merchant of Venice*. It is as though the aim and purpose of the play's movement were to solidify itself. And the whole result is weighty, held in the mind as something 'ponderous and substantial', it is still, though made of action; solid, though built of flux, or, to use Shakespeare's favourite symbols, it is music created of thunderous and tempestuous conflict. Passive, it radiates power, and, existing subject to neither time nor space, it seems composed of both.

So any poet's resolution of conflicts particular to himself makes, in the whole art-form, a single quiescent yet potent passively-active reality. Moreover, whatever personal distresses and conflicts of his day the artist bodies forth, the resulting stillness makes a significant wedge into life exposing light for other generations with other conflicts though in Shakespeare the conflicts are generally universal enough with direct significances for the modern world.

Many of our difficulties – the matter of significant relations independent of order, the mystery of a seeming stillness made of movement, the paradox of a passive activity – are illuminated by our recognizing that the germ of composition is an intuitive perception of a certain stillness and

idea or quality. Such an intuition will condition creation. It will not necessarily come before the work is started, but we must suppose there to be always a moment of conception during the early stages of composition, when the essential nature of the work to be is first properly apparent. This then becomes the nucleus, preliminary drafts or ideas – if any – are re-coloured to tone with it, action and imagery clothe it, grow from it, cluster round it. Or perhaps it is better to say that all actions, events, and images that clash with the central intuition are rejected. It comes to the same thing. No doubt such a process may be repeated more than once, as the work grows under writing and revision, with a developing conception. But we need not here multiply our troubles, artistic creation, like any other type of creation, is something of a mystery. So we will assume a single central, though dynamic, stillness at the back of the process, a hub of the turning wheel. From this central principle you can begin to understand the work in its wholeness. That is why, in interpreting a play's intellectual meaning, you cannot or must not work from the surface. However careful and subtle your elucidation of details and correspondences along the surface, you cannot give a dynamic interpretation without some sense of a whole – either the whole play, or the whole of one aspect. To do this you must intuitively recognize a central principle of some kind and call on quotations only as evidence. For example, I feel there is a mass of references to crowns, sceptres, and regal pomp in *Macbeth* – and so, in evidence, I write down quotations irrespective of their order, since each relates, primarily, not to others, but to a certain centrality that gives them all meaning – here a certain sense-perception of the glories of kingship. At the centre of creation and understanding alike remains a stillness, the hub of the wheel.

And the completed result, as a whole, shares this quality of stillness, as the rim of a whirling wheel is still, or appears so. From the action and movement is thrown up a spiritual edifice, a solid of the mind, a cinematograph roll – every un-

rolling of it in performance or reading rolls it into a new solid in the recipient's imagination. A performance is therefore not simply a sequence but architectonic, and makes a mind-building. In *Abt Vogler* Browning imagines an organ as making of great music a mystic building, and in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* the paradisaical dome could be 'built in air' by 'symphony and song'. In describing fine architecture you might say it seems to be creating itself instant by instant: this touches its expressly dynamic, rhythmic, and vital quality; oppositely, I give corresponding emphasis to the solid quality of great poetry. All great art forces the mind to understand the paradox of a rhythmic pulsing solidity, to blend spatial and temporal conceptions. It introduces us directly to that which is built of both and beyond both, space-time, or eternity. This is how Dante's great poem, explicitly projecting events in their eternal quality, has an exact, implicit, analogy throughout Shakespeare.

#### 4 HOW IT DOES IT

This peculiar flexible-solid quality of the literary art-form is created by its limiting itself at some point. The end stops the narrative accumulation, and that stoppage turns the river into a reservoir, so to speak. We must on no account allow a leakage. In terms of an art-form we can get a certain revelation, but only if we respect its necessary limits.

The conventions of poetic drama forbid our complaining at the technical limiting and compression by which the loving Othello's mistrust is raised within a half-hour's scene, or complaining of the speed of Faustus' clock, or wondering how a man with Iago's peculiar tendencies has lived in freedom until the play's opening. You must resolutely confine your attention within certain limits; you must receive the whole play, neither more nor less. Consider the two main types of play: romance and tragedy. These express two primary rhythms: the love-quest and the death-quest, and the feeling of relief they instil is a relaxing of tensions, that of unsatisfied love and that of unsatisfied life.

torn from its context, uprooted and dead. But poetry gives us not the factual, which is dead, but the actual, which lives. It aims to reintegrate our abstractions into their only proper context in the whole of life. The cramming of such unlimited significances into one short self-limited work necessarily forces the creation of statements and symbols at first sight hard to accept. The play's limits, observe, force the creation of miraculous events which in turn are to be understood in terms of those artistic limits. The problem of the New Testament is closely related. Such strange events, we had better say, are true in their context and as part of the whole. Certainly, they are always most important for our understanding. If you refuse them your 'willing suspension of disbelief' you mutilate that whole and its meaning, but if you focus the whole pattern, no less and no more, infinite vistas are opened. This is particularly to be remembered in reading the Final Plays. Thus in *Pericles* you must give the same kind of assent to the miraculous resurrection of Thaisa as you would to the raising of Lazarus in the New Testament.

To put it shortly, poetic drama does something both more difficult and more important than the realistic plays of to-day. But it can address the mind only through use of conventions. The conclusion to *Measure for Measure* can be understood only from a formal acceptance of the peculiar quality of the whole play. Finally, every play demands a different kind of acceptance, so that the peculiar convention of a work of art is that work of art itself. Hence the importance of pure acceptance as the condition of understanding, as when you the more easily do a complicated calculation in mathematics by agreeing that a letter shall stand for a number, and by so doing work out an answer true for all values of your letter—that is, an answer of universal quality.

To sum up. (i) The Shakespearian play is a creation of intellectual and imagistic complexity demanding and exhausting all our powers of analysis. (ii) This is not incom-

patible with what we may suppose its manner of composition (iii) It is primarily an aural time-sequence with rhythmic modulations (iv) It nevertheless creates in the mind a result that may be imaged as spatial and visual, solid and rich in sense-suggestion, which spatial result is nevertheless wound into the mind along a time-sequence, so that we must call it some sort of a 'space-time' creation, tuning our minds to full awareness of its space-time dimension (v) This, its particularly universal and eternal quality, is closely related to the proper use of conventions

Next I build from these some general principles of actual production I shall concentrate mainly on the Tragedies, which raise most clearly the crucial problems But what I have to say applies with equal force to all except the more farcical elements in the Comedies

## II

# THE THEORY OF PRODUCTION

### I

THE producer should be aware of the play's metaphysical core, that is, of its wholeness. He must not consider *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* just good stories with occasional 'dramatic situations', no modern producer would blunder like that with a Galsworthy play. Close intellectual interpretation must come first: which interpretation, if, shall we say, of *Macbeth*, involves numerous subtleties.<sup>1</sup> But the closest attention to details, unless also vitalized by a sense of some unifying idea, will prove fruitless. *Macbeth* must be seen first as a conflict of life-forces and death-forces, and not until this, or some other general principle of similar status, is grasped can surface details possibly find their proper places. I have heard *Othello* called a poetic melodrama without modern meaning or any universal reference. That is, indeed, the current academic view of it, certainly it is usually produced as such. But it is all wrong, utterly wrong. The theme of *Othello* is as human and universal as can be. Desdemona is the eternal principle of romantic value, Iago, the insistent demon of denial. Othello, like each of us, is caught between these. Iago is devilishly clever, Desdemona, divinely beautiful. Not only is Othello's story not irrelevant to us: we slay Desdemona half a dozen times most days of our life. Within

1 For example at *Macbeth*, IV, III, 186, Ross addresses Macduff

Your eye in Scotland

Would create soldiers, make our women fight

It is his way of breaking the news whilst simultaneously preparing revenge-thoughts as an antidote. 'Create' and 'women' refer respectively to Macduff's children and wife. His eye fixes Macduff as he speaks, meaningfully. The obvious mistake is to speak these lines to Malcolm.

the human action of any great play eternal conflicts are displayed

So the producer must not deduce his business from the play's surface. He must make, as it were, a leap to the inward meaning and use the play's surface as expression, must not be content to start where Shakespeare left off, but rather start with Shakespeare and go with him. Though seemingly irrational, this is a process of universal application. My own interpretations aim to obey this law. They are, in a sense, re-creations, not translations, and this because they uncover some central and unifying idea, giving it next a new structure in interpretation. I have been warned that my essays are not the same as Shakespeare, I have also, seriously, been warned that they cannot expect to supersede Shakespeare. I suppose a perfect description of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would be a reflection of it, a re-creation similar in every way, and only Shakespeare could do that. But, indeed, it would be that same play, which we have already. Interpretation will always be a development in a new medium of some central idea of wholeness in the original, grasp of that central idea forcing a vital re-creation. It is the same with production. You must make a leap into the abstract in order to realize the concrete, that unwinding from one roll into another to which I have before referred is not so simple as it at first appears. There is something about the human mind that necessitates this zig-zag leap in all endeavour. We must abstract. In our attention to the widest issues of life, we always abstract. Science, philosophy, history — all are abstractions. Indeed, abstraction conditions all conscious action. But the best way to regain full concrete perception of particulars is the religious way, to make the one grand abstraction and leap of intuition and name it God, seeing next everything as expressions of God. That is how the religious attitude is finally more concrete than others, why it touches the actual as they do not, why the account of the creation in Genesis, by putting it all on to God, is the only finally satisfying account of creation in its



wholeness that we have. Enlightened abstraction is half-way to concrete understanding. So the producer who hopes for any solid and concrete result shrinks at his peril the effort of intellectual abstraction.

He has to get the play from the text on to the living stage. It is rather like moving a delicate piece of furniture or machinery. Carry it bodily across and bits will be broken off. It must be carefully taken to pieces and rebuilt. The producer should be able to hold the play in jig-saw bits in his mind, to sort them all out, to build with them and re-create the whole from understanding of its nature. Such understanding gives him full powers to cut, adapt, even, on rare occasions, transpose, according to circumstances, he has to consider his stage, his company, his audience. The feeling that cutting is sacrilegious derives from a totally false reasoning. The producer's business is not translation, but re-creation. It is, however, true that nothing more swiftly and irrevocably gives a producer away than unenlightened cutting or iniquitous transpositions and additions. You must by thought and intimate acquaintance acquire the right to do these things. I have seen a production where Ophelia's description of Hamlet's mysterious insanity and newly-dishevelled appearance was cut, presumably so that the hero might, as is, I fear, usual in every Hamlet I have seen, walk about in a particularly spruce and attractive, black suit during the middle action. *The Merchant of Venice* often starts with merry-making, despite Shakespeare's contrast of Venice with Belmont in point of tragedy, and the accordingly emphasized melancholy of Antonio's first speech.

You cannot properly produce a play without some sense of it as a whole. But you often find actor or producer saying 'That is a good and profound idea, but it is not dramatic' whereas a good idea concerning a great play must be dramatic, otherwise it is a bad idea, not a good one. Probably the good idea relates to the play as a whole, and may thus be incompatible with some easy but irrelevant dramatic

thrill The immediate and transient dramatic effect is not everything I have known an actor very naturally proud of gaining a round of applause after a long speech within a scene, but, had the action been truly holding its audience, applause would have been impossible Some producers explicitly ask their audience not to do this To conclude a scene on a powerful climax may miss a far subtler and more Shakespearian effect of anti-climax I have even known the curtain brought down on Juliet's death Certainly you will get more applause that way But getting applause is a psychological trick Certain gestures, certain climaxes, certain ways of drawing the curtains to tempt fresh claps from a desultory audience, all call it down But let the producer beware lest, like Samson at Gaza, he pull the whole palace of art crashing to destruction on his own and his company's heads A touring company used regularly to bring down the curtain on the murder scene in *Macbeth* with a crowd of actors waving swords and shouting, 'Well contented!' There was great applause Then up came the curtain, the swords of the encouraged company waved and flashed again, and renewed volumes rolled out, 'Well contented! We-ell con-ten-ted!' Thunderous applause Then all over again, as long as the audience would clap I suppose this must be called a successful dramatic climax But anything farther from the play's meaning at this point could scarcely be imagined You would think they were all pleased - Macduff included - at Duncan's murder What was called for was, of course, a sullen murmur from a few - and only a few - of the crowd Or, if this makes an undesirable conclusion, then let the producer cut the final speech, and finish with Banquo's words, and the crowd's 'So all!' This is, I fear, an example of what the theatre too often means by the word 'dramatic'

Thinking not of individual moments but of the whole play, the producer will study to make the grouping and action continually reflect, not the passing incident only, but its relation to the whole The whole play should often seem

implicit in the particular moment. Such a technique is often almost forced, as with the first entry of Antony with Cleopatra. But even this is sometimes distorted, with no play of pageantry or dignified centrality for the two protagonists. This quality of the significant moment, continual in Shakespeare, can often be greatly forwarded by careful arrangement. You can often suggest additional implicit significances where the text at first sight gives you little help. Usually we find fertile instances in the text deliberately killed in production. Romeo's 'O, I am fortune's fool' has been given no particular emphasis and drowned in other noises, and Macduff's 'Wherefore did you so?' spoken without challenge in either position or utterance. At every moment the production itself should seem aware of the whole play's meaning.

Production should embody the quality of the text in other ways also. Shakespeare's writing varies widely from pure colloquialism to elaborate poetic dignity. *Othello* provides an excellent example. Othello's meeting with Desdemona at Cyprus is something of high romantic fervour and the poetry swells out with symbolic suggestions of a particular kind. The use of guns here is most important. You see the happy warrior, victorious over man and tempestuous seas, stepping from hard warrior-triumph to the peace of a radiant love. This follows a dialogue of pure colloquialism between Iago and Desdemona. A change must be apparent. Othello's entry will be rich in glamour, probably central and raised, the general effect a tableau. In a recent production Othello and Desdemona met in what looked like an interior, with no implied suggestion in the action of any warlike excitement or thunderous triumph, no thought of battlements frowning over a tempestuous sea. There was no crowd pageantry – which you can, of course, get with quite a few actors – no interpretation of the peculiar quality of the scene. The protagonists met as two lovers might meet anywhere. Nor was there anything particularly striking in Othello's dress to suggest the magnificent warrior. Or with

*King Lear* The middle scenes are highly fantastic. How often do you find this madness extravaganza given sensitive projection in grouping, action, and speech? This, the heart of the play, is a world rocking at its foundations. Naked Tom must not sit up to a table with Kent, the Fool, and Lear as though they were all having a comfortable evening meal. This massive play works up to so transcendent a fantasia of mental agony, which cannot be properly given without care.

Today we have two main varieties of failure. We have the production that gives Shakespeare as strong melodrama, unfortunately somewhat over-cumbered with archaic poeticisms, but nevertheless with enough story and interesting situations to make it worth doing. This type gives you no sense of any extra levels of meaning, and you get no feeling for the art-form as an organic whole. Recently I saw such a production of *Romeo and Juliet*. It was highly praised. Its technique was slick and finished and perfectly timed. The acting was good. But there were no undercurrents of significance. It was smooth melodrama, not poetic tragedy. You got no suggestion of tableaux in the meetings of the Houses, the fights were random sword-clinkings drowning words, street-brawls, no more, music for some reason most inappropriately blurred. Mercutio's descriptions of Tybalt, the Prince, representative of civic authority, wore a helmet, the Apothecary scene was given hurriedly as nothing more than a necessary action link, and the final scene was arranged incorrectly with the tombs down-stage. Almost every scene ended with a black-out. What complaints I have against all this will be clearer later. For the moment, I suggest merely that this was a typical modern production, excellent, professional, and mechanical. The sets were a succession of separately pleasing and tasteful scenes, not over-realistic, but bound together by no sort of permanence.<sup>1</sup> The time-stream of event was given with smart unvaried pace, but no deeper suggestions, no spatialized and spiritual

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps unjust: the soft colours created an *atmospheric* unity that stands the test of memory (1947).

architecture, took shape before the inward eye. In the whole production I detected only one really creative stroke. I was told by a friend, Prof. Gilbert Norwood, that one performance was exquisite, but he left me to discover which selected the one he meant. Tybalt I found impressive, original, significant, though I could not tell why. Prof. Norwood had the reason: the part was performed with deliberate feline suggestion in make-up and action. The result was remarkable. Observe (1) that this was gained by developing something already in Shakespeare, the association of the name Tybalt with cats being pointed in the text, and (2) that such significances can, as Mr. Eliot has said of poetry, communicate before they are understood. I did not myself get the point, but recognized, and in some sense appreciated, the significance. Similarly, in my own productions, I do not expect an audience to be conscious of all the issues raised in my own mind during rehearsal. All one asks of an audience is imaginative receptivity: but you must ask more of your producer — the producer must have ideas.

Must have ideas. And yet these, too, can be disastrous. Which brings us to the second type of failure: the would-be 'symbolical' production, which saddles Shakespeare with elaborations that do not properly relate to the play. I have heard of the Weird Sisters being brought on at the end of *Macbeth*, or, maybe, only flashed in silhouette on the scene. This is quite wrong. The poetic atmosphere of *Macbeth* changes towards the close: Murk, nightmare, and confusion are replaced by daylight, purpose, colour. *Macbeth* has woken up. The prophecies are revealed as having natural fulfilments. The supernatural has melted. *Macbeth* has supped full with horrors, and direness no more frights him. There is here no place for the Weird Sisters. Recently I saw a well-acted and skilfully produced *Hamlet*. The whole was melodious and enjoyable, harmonious to ear and eye alike. Visually you received impressions of an almost Oriental splendour. The lighting was subtle and subdued, a Celtic twilight brooding over the action, quite alien to the stark

intellectual quality of the play. There was some cleverly disciplined crowd-work: the company was especially good at circular crowd-swirls, interthreading into a vortex and unwinding very prettily. But all this was not very useful for *Hamlet*. After the play had unsettled the King, the courtiers and ladies circled for awhile like the blessed spirits in Dante's Paradise, ladies clustered over the dead Queen at the finish like Dante's ecclesiastical Rose, and the King died on a glorious pirouette. Such lovely circles, however, are scarcely suitable for *Hamlet*. The play expresses something more angular, enigmatic, out of joint like a broken arm. Now for *Antony and Cleopatra* it might be different. This luxuriant harmony characterized the whole. The performance was a joy. It lasted four hours, and I could have heard and seen it all over again, but there was too little of *Hamlet* in my mind. I have known the *Merchant of Venice* seriously mishandled. It was a very 'original' production. That, today, means, I fear, that all sorts of queer and wrong things happened that bore no relation to the text. The caskets, which should be dominating and solid, were painted on an arras falling down the side of a higher stage-level. Not distinguishing them, one felt hot during Morocco's speech, suspecting a mistake. Finally he produced the caskets' contents from the wall. I still don't know how. When Bassanio's turn came there was not even the wall. He stood fingering the keys and speaking 'This time', I thought, 'something has gone wrong'. But the higher level slowly rose during his speech, and, by the time Bassanio was ready, the caskets, or pictures of them, were in place. You see, none of this illuminates the text, and much of it will distract and often conflict violently with words spoken. During Bassanio's speech in the first scene describing Portia to Antonio the stage behind the speakers slowly opened, and Portia was supposed to rise - actually the machinery went wrong - sitting on Belmont: the words did not need that sort of pointing. But here is something we may approve: the Cauldron scene in *Macbeth* has been done with voices off and Macbeth tossing

restlessly on a couch. That is far from an ideal arrangement but observe how it at least preserved the spirit of the play and relates to the numerous nightmare references in the text.

I follow these preliminary and general remarks with more exact argument. Thus I present under certain separate headings related to those of my first chapter.

## 2 MAINLY TEMPORAL AND AURAL

The Shakespearian play is composed of a time-sequence of sounds. The sounds — words and additional effects — are, as it were, given. The producer has to make them live, express them in human action and stage-arrangements and machinery of various kinds and give them an appropriate setting. Nevertheless, it is well to remember that the sounds come first. Nothing must smother or distort them.

Shakespearian speech demands close and subtle attention, and its satisfactory rendering is so difficult that we may safely call it, on the whole, impossible.<sup>1</sup> That need not prevent us from doing our best. The main principle already laid down for production applies to speaking in particular. You must capture the underlying experience of the words and so, living in the thought and emotion, let the words give them poetic expression. An actor with a good voice may well think he has only to give varied vocal embodiment to fine rhetoric, side-tracking the intellectual content. He may feel the poet has done all that for him, and all he has to do is to build from the poetic result. But it will not do. He must get at the experience behind the words, suffer each swift change of thought, actually see, or aim at seeing, the phantasmagoria of imagery, till each phrase be variously and delicately tinted from within by the blood-essence of a

<sup>1</sup> Remember that no one properly hears his own voice. It is easy to let your intellectual understanding deceive you as to the power and beauty of your vocal projection. You hear your own voice partly from within the head. It is usually pitched higher and with less variation than the speaker supposes. A good plan—if you can stand the shock—is to have a record made,

felt significance. A beautiful and melodious voice may become a danger, each note and curve, however exquisite, unless closely related to and disciplined by the inward significances, may result in a collection of graceful corpses, perfumed with death.

Often today you get a stagey ring. If analysed, you would find, I think, that this staginess reduces to a series of emphases out of accord with the meaning, especially a tendency to strike a ringing anvil-blow on some not particularly emphatic monosyllable at a line's end, a fault which often seems to attack actors with exceptionally beautiful voices.

I offer some examples of the subtlety Shakespearian verse demands of an actor. In a mood of despair Hamlet thinks how he

can say nothing. No, not for a king  
Upon whose property and most dear life  
A damned defeat was made.

I suggest that he speaks in a black mood, but, rising out from it comes the thought of his father, and the quality of the phrase 'most dear life' should be reflected in the light of the eye, the flicker of a smile, for a fraction of time before the mood recloses on 'damned'. If this were ordinary talk, such a physical change would within one mood be impossible; but such poetry reveals qualities of thought, not tricks of behaviour. It is highly complex, exposing extra dimensions of human experience. But you must never get too far from the appearances of ordinary speech. Consider Hamlet's lines to his mother:

Look here, upon this picture and on this,  
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.  
See, what a grace was seated on this brow,  
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,  
An eye like Mars to threaten and command,  
A station like the herald Mercury  
New lighted on a heaven kissing hill,  
A combination and a form indeed  
Where every god did seem to set his seal  
To give the world assurance of a man.



This is my reading The first line is colloquial, the second meditative The third rises to a more rhetorical timbre Next the specific quality of each god is vocally reflected glory for Hyperion, awe for Jupiter, militaristic resonance for Mars with reverberations on the word 'command', and then a pure lyricism, a trilling ascent, for the next line's imagistic grace and thin vowels - 'like', 'Mercury', 'lighted', 'kissing', 'hill', and the numerous 'e' sounds<sup>1</sup> It does no harm to dwell on the 'kissing' for an instant, poised there in mid-flight Then you drop back to matter-of-fact colloquialism for the last lines The little unit has a poetic rise, meridian, and fall You must aim vocally to capture these rhythms already deep-bedded in the meaning and also clearly embodied in the poetic expression

All this demands intellectual study You cannot get a speech properly across without understanding and living it But unfortunately the understanding it and living it will not necessarily get it across There is the hard physical technique of clear utterance, breath-control, and so on, and in concentrating on this you may quite likely lose all the rest It is as difficult as golf

A stagey ring is bad, and an academic sing-song worse But the wrong sort of colloquialism is perhaps worst of all some people who have no sense of metre split up the verse unforgivably, or point the meaning of each simplest word as if talking to a child or a foreigner I have also heard an actress whose diction was so perfect and voice so clear that

<sup>1</sup> Compare Vernon's speech in *1 Henry IV*, iv, 1, 97-110 Observe its 'bird' and 'Mercury' images, and the way lightness of action is conveyed by light vowel sounds *estruges, wind, glittering, images, spirit, cusses, thighs*, etc Contrast with this these lines from Hotspur's answer

Come, let me taste my horse,  
Who is to bear me like a thunderbolt  
Against the bosom of the Prince of Wales  
Harry to Harry shall, hot horse to horse,  
Meet and ne'er part till one drop down a corse

The difference between the 'characters' of Hotspur and Prince Hal is here a matter of vowel sounds

you became conscious only of diction and clarity, forgetting the play, just as a too melodious voice, unless rigidly controlled by meaning, acts as a soporific. You must avoid too much of any good thing. The safest investment is constant, and significant, variation, with deeper notes for the appropriate thoughts and images. Shakespeare's temporal sequences, whether of speech or scenes or the fortunes of his people, continually move in waves. But the waves of voice must be closely related to colloquial variation and meaning, and yet again there are times when a single intensity on one pitch gives more power than any degree of colloquialism. I seem to remember Violet Vanbrugh getting some such effect with Lady Macbeth's invocation to evil in Sir Herbert Tree's production in 1912, and I have never heard it done so well since. Incidentally, the Weir Sisters almost always fail by using too raucous and naturalistically varied an utterance, whereas surely they do better with a wailing note like the whining of a wintry wind.

Possibilities are legion. Sudden colloquialism may be a stab of lightning across poetic sublimity, or *vice versa*. Each outlines, vitalizes, the other. There is variation in pace to be considered. Today speed is the danger. The modern actor often skips through the verse with a deadly facility. One feels he is not living the experiences behind the words.

I think one should sometimes definitely pause on a grand and glowing phrase, as though to cauterize the minds of the audience with its white-hot iron. In Othello's jealousy the lines are too often given as any old stream of fury to express a psychological state of ungoverned savagery. Rather the implied psychological state is there as rough scaffolding on which to erect the carven edifice of great poetry. Living the supposed actual experience is not enough: you must live the poetic experience. It is clear that poetry does not just express psychological behaviour. Observe how illogically Cleopatra keeps pouring blank verse at the messenger whilst impatient for his news: dramatic poetry is mainly concerned with expression of deep and complicated inward - or out-

ward - experiences in terms of a most subtle intellectual technique. So, though the actor must, according to his conception, himself in part live Othello's supposed fury, he is to make of it something very different. His technique is to be as subtle and assured as the poetry. We have all seen Othello look like a big black man in a rage, and Macbeth at the play's conclusion like a wild and haggard criminal run to earth. Just what they are - and yet, are not. The actor should feel something of that, but not look it, or sound it. There is a repose and dignity necessary to the essential meaning of art. 'In the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.' The emotional limits of pure naturalism are, anyway, quickly reached, and you get shouts and ranting that signify nothing, whereas a close artistic control from the first, with definite, self-imposed limits, has an infinite reserve of power. Which is a principle of universal truth and applies to any art, and, for that matter, to life itself. And then again in any art there is a control and dignity and classic grace that is the primrose way to death - which is, also, true of life in general. The ideal producer will know all this, and have actors, if he is very lucky, who can put it all immediately into practice.

What the actor has to do is, of course, somehow to get the blood-pulse and rhythmic beat of the living lines, and also the wider wave-lengths of each verse paragraph, each singing and dying movement, or the gathering up of a play's power into one great moment of tragic dignity, such as that crest we have noticed already in the story of Richard II, and then the cadences, the solemnity, the aftermaths of peace. The necessary control we are considering is one with the point we made in discussing Richard. Shakespeare's tragic protagonists are not to be regarded as weak failures curiously gifted with oratorical power. Rather they are voices giving outward show to a more inward quality; expressing the victory that is always bursting defeat like a bird from an eggshell, revealing that heavier and more

solidified world, that unruffled peace built of turbulence, the extra-dimensional music

We cannot do full vocal justice to Shakespearian verse, but we can avoid crass blunders. This infinitely subtle correspondence to each fleeting thought and delicate emotion need hardly ever be accompanied with gasps, groans, and sobs. I have seen a six-foot Romeo lie on the stage making awful sob-sounds.

Wert thou as young as I, Juliet thy love,  
An hour but married, Tybalt murdered,  
Doting like me, and like me banished,  
Then might'st thou weep, then might'st thou tear thy hair,  
And fall upon the ground, as I do now,  
Taking the measure of an unmade grave

The maximum of rhetorical power should be put into the fling and abandon of such a speech, but never for an instant should emotion overspill the cup of poetic control. Too often we find simultaneously a fear of rhetorical abandon and a desire for crude expression in sobs and gasps. Romeo should not be a big baby here, but a terrific poetic force. Let the torrential flow gather up and crash over musically. The bodily fall should be itself melodious, matching the fall of the line, while the voice correspondingly descends the scale, and after the grand swaying cadences of the last two lines Romeo must lie still and silent. The emotion should come through the words and action, not in extempore animal sounds of the actor's invention.

In stabbing himself Antony need not gasp or grunt. It makes you think something has gone wrong and he is really hurt.

Beside and beyond the words we also must consider off-stage sound-effects. These are frequent and of great importance. Their neglect or slurring is probably the most outstanding defect in modern Shakespearian production. I refer to trumpets, alarums, drums, cannon, tolling bells, and, above all, the thunder-tempests and music. On these two latter, as I have argued at length, the Shakespearian

world revolves they, and all kindred effects, must be employed exactly and powerfully. Nothing must take precedence over them. If no other reasons existed, elaborate and detailed realistic sets would have to be ruled out for their rival and hostile appeal. Off-stage sounds have a valuable quality of mystery<sup>1</sup> and universality that certain sorts of visual realism will hopelessly mar. They work most powerfully from a restrained and simplified setting.

Too often you find no intelligent emphasis on these sounds. Often they are wrongly used. Over the radio I have heard the Ghost's entry in *Hamlet* accompanied by music. This is seriously un-Shakespearian. Music in Shakespeare is always optimistically charged and deliberately contrasted with such civic and cosmic disorders as Horatio compares the Ghost to. The Ghost, you may suggest, should then enter to thunder, like the Weird Sisters. But Shakespeare gives no hint of this. The elemental setting is neither one thing nor the other. It is a cloudy night, 'bitter cold', with stars, but only 'glimpes of the moon'. Indeed, we never know quite how to take this Ghost: is he a spirit blessed or goblin damned? It is the problem of the play. The portentous figure is morally and aesthetically enigmatic: hence his enigmatic elemental setting. If we want a sound-effect here we must devise — or search in the text for — something in between (e.g. wind, surf).

This may all sound very super-subtle. Besides, you can<sup>m</sup> perhaps argue that this radio-music was evilly toned, like that barbaric music to which the torture-procession passes in Flecker's *Hassan*. In *Hassan*, however, the sensuously pleasing is throughout blended with the horrible after a fashion quite un-Shakespearian. Shakespeare, unlike Marlowe and Ben Jonson, refuses to allow sensuous delight to

1 Compare the powerful use of tom-toms in Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, and that of the sound of a rushing train in two modern melodramas, *The Ghost Train* and *The Wrecker*. The modern theatre underrates the importance and dignity of convincing sounds in the same proportion as it overrates the possibilities and power of visual realism. *Journey's End* was a fine exception. In Shakespeare the matter is crucial. R

associate directly with evil his negations are conflicts, never – or hardly ever – harmonies They thus have appropriate effects of battle-alarums and thunder

I have also heard Juliet's potion speech ruined by the introduction of intermittent thunder Shakespeare, one feels, would have directed thunder had he wanted it However, it is a correct Shakespearian effect Why is thunder here fatal?

You will find actual thunder does not accompany purely individual and personal psychic conflicts Such are often enough compared in simile and metaphor to tempests and thunder, but that is all In *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* the thunder accompanies rather a wholesale disorder, a vision of almost cosmic, certainly of civil, conflict Though this may be related, as I have shown elsewhere, directly to the protagonist's own inward disorder, yet that disorder is not, on the stage, accompanied by audible thunder Brutus meditates in his orchard, Macbeth and his wife murder Duncan, in silence the poetry speaks of whizzing exhalations or tells us that the night has been unruly, but there are no stage sounds Indeed, the quality of these two scenes is pre-eminently one of hushed tensivity Lear certainly stands alone – or almost so – addressing an actual thunder-tempest, and thunder previously blends with his determination to go mad rather than weep, and intermittently accompanies the cracking of his reason later But, first, Lear and his setting are peculiarly blended and both peculiarly cosmic the tempest relates to Goneril, Regan and Cornwall and their cruelty also, indeed, to the whole conception of conflict within creation on a wide scale And, second, the outstanding and memorable effect of these moments is due to their exceptional daring – indeed, it is probably this that does most to make us feel Lear himself as a cosmic force. Fearful supernatural beings – the minatory Jupiter in *Cymbeline*, Ariel and his 'ministers of fate' in *The Tempest*, the Weird Sisters and their Apparitions in *Macbeth* – all may have thunder But observe that a ghost never does A ghost

is to be considered less than a human being, but a divine or wholly supernatural figure is by way of being a universal force. So thunder is never domestic. Even for Othello's jealousy it would be grossly out of place,<sup>1</sup> for Juliet's mental conflict in extreme and pathetic loneliness it is quite impossible. You cannot help feeling Lady Capulet ought to hear it and come to see what Juliet is thinking about so to upset Verona's summer weather. It is easy now to see why thunder is never used in *Hamlet*, so eminently a psychological play, and why the use of ear-splitting cracks, together with a black-out, at the entrance of the Ghost in the Closet scene, where Hamlet alone sees it, may be particularly distressing. You feel sure the Queen must have noticed something.<sup>2</sup> Actual stage thunder is always cosmic, and has dramatically communal rather than psychological and domestic reverberations. Besides, thunder is from above, a ghost from below.

The opposing Shakespearian effect of music is, on the contrary, more closely related to individual persons. Often enough, of course, music significantly accompanies a general social harmony – as with the first entrance of Caesar, the Danish March in *Hamlet*, the music at the feasting of Duncan (observe there is none – nor thunder – at the later feast attended by Banquo's Ghost), the feasts given by Timon, and that in *Antony and Cleopatra*. But the subtler music incidents in Shakespeare are more inwardly concerned. At the end of *Richard II*, in the Welsh scene in *1 Henry IV* and the tavern-scene in *2 Henry IV*, the Brutus and Lucius incident

<sup>1</sup> The nearest approach is the wind heard by Desdemona in her willow song scene.

<sup>2</sup> The question of an audience's acceptance of a stage person's apparent insensitivity was curiously raised when I did *Hamlet* in Toronto. Hamlet with drawn sword soliloquizes over the praying King. The sheathing of my sword was audible, and it seemed the King should have heard it. But no one worried about the words. The convention of soliloquy and asides is embedded in theatrical tradition, but you have far less latitude with non verbal sounds, with the occasional exception of music.

in *Julius Caesar*, Ophelia's and Desdemona's songs, Lear's reunion with Cordelia, the mysterious 'hautboys' in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the recurrent reunions after resurrection in the Final Plays, music suggests either some spiritual harmony related to an individual or the love of two individuals, or some universal and mystic peace touched by the protagonist, such as 'the music of the spheres' in *Pericles* and the solemn music of Queen Katharine's paradise-vision in *Henry VIII*. Hermione is resurrected to music in *The Winter's Tale*. Continually elsewhere music is directly related to love, as in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*. Certainly it may tend to fill the whole action of the earlier Romances at times but that is because these are saturated with romantic love, and may be considered dream-projections of inward longing. The Final Plays, including *The Tempest* and Ariel's music, are, I take it, more realistically conceived, more authentic records of spiritual victory and their resurrection music demands especially careful elaboration.

Our continual disregard of Shakespeare's technique in this matter is seen in the persistent ignoring of stage-directions in the *Macbeth* Cauldron scene. The three Apparitions, as I have often demonstrated, form a precise miniature of the whole play's dramatic conflict. Appropriately, they rise from the cauldron to thunder. They are followed shortly by the line of kings. These, being creative and harmonious visions hostile to the evil, the Weird Sisters are loth to show. Macbeth insists. The cauldron vanishes, and the kings, who do not rise from the cauldron, pass to the music of hautboys. (Compare the hautboys of the mystic music in *Antony and Cleopatra*.) Modern production hardly ever leaves you clear as to what is happening in this scene. As to observing the contrast between the two sorts of apparition, the very suggestion appears nowadays a 'subjective' or 'mystical' interpretation.

I cannot over-stress the importance of all these and other kindred sounds. The bell that invites Macbeth to crime, let it not tinkle, but ring ominously. The knocking at the gate



too often suggests rather an irritable postman than a fateful summons. The effects in *Hamlet* of kettle-drums, trumpets, and cannon are most important. Observe how they come first shortly before the Ghost's entry, then once at Hamlet's first hit in the duel, and again at the close, and also how at both the beginning and end of the play they are associated with the King's drinking to Hamlet. The main action is framed by these sounds. The trumpets in *Measure for Measure* and *King Lear* should sound a universal judgment call. And so on. The main issue is clear. As for fights and alarums and shouts – as in *Coriolanus* – they all need careful attention and elaborate orchestration. A Shakespearian tragedy normally ends with fighting. The profounder middle conflict finds expression and resolution in militaristic and open opposition. Much of the producer's difficulty here, due to swords being no longer associated in the communal mind with actual danger, can be surmounted by careful sound-effects. A not too closely-defined suggestion of modern warfare might help.

All sound-effects must be carefully interspaced, orchestrated, with the words. Neither must interrupt the other without a pure sequence, you get no waves, no rhythms, and without rhythms, no variation and definition. Stage thunder is usually either pitifully weak or, if strong, it drowns the speeches. There is no reason why the tempest in *King Lear* – or anywhere else – should not be positively thunderous. The kind of thing I mean you get excellently done in a musical oratorio very often, which is often far more Shakespearian and dramatic than the average Shakespearian production. You should feel the theatre is coming down. Then let it dwindle, and over it rise Lear's words:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!  
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
 Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!

More peals of thunder, again curving down as Lear continues

You sulphurous and thought-executing fires

Especially you need fine reverberations before 'Rumble thy bellyful' <sup>1</sup> The thunder, you see, is an actor in the play, and the thunder-master must know his cues Where you are given only a stage-direction at the start, the producer must work out appropriate moments in the dialogue for himself But they must be properly planned A usual fallacy supposes words are effectively spoken through sounds such as thunder, shouts (as at Laertes' rebellious entry), or music This is hardly ever so A far finer effect is gained by interweaving, the one dying away as the other comes over – comes over, not through You get rhythmic waves, significant undulations A highly lyrical passage of spoken verse is not improved by music Nor do I like to hear Oberon speak two lines of 'I know a bank', and then definitely sing the rest to an orchestral accompaniment Where music accompanies dialogue, as in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*, great care is needed that no words be lost The music can die away almost inaudibly, then rise and hold the stage alone, leading up to, shall we say, Orsino's 'How dost thou like this tune?' In *King Lear* the continual directions of 'storm still' <sup>2</sup> hint at such a technique of intermittent sounds We need not wait always for actual directions we can fol-

1 Observe the harsh guttural consonants in Lear's first speech *crack your cheeks, cataracts and hurricanoes, thought executing, vaunt couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts, thick rotundity, ingrateful man* Notice a subtle contrast in the sounds of his second speech, striking a more reserved note of pathos The speaking should follow hints such as these as far as possible For example, observe the long vowels in Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' soliloquy *sleep, heartache, dream, pause* The thought interrupts them for a while Then again *weary life, bourn, returns* It is not a question for statistics but it is worth attention Observe the contrast in these two lines

When Richard, with his eyes brimfull of tears,  
I hen check'd and rated by Northumberland

(2 *Henry IV*, III, i, 67)

2 Such sound directions will be found in the Folio, and are to be sharply distinguished from the false scene directions added by later commentators Original directions will generally be either (1) aural or (11) ceremonial, later additions generally scenic A significant contrast

low their spirit without limiting ourselves to the letter. But the speeches must get across. However loud the hurly-burly, as in the street brawl in *Romeo and Juliet*, you need never drown the words.

Indeed the producer should never allow conflicting centres of interest to hold the stage simultaneously. The subtle comedy of Shallow's conversation has been ruined by the ragamuffin recruits searching their tatters for fleas. How could subtlety possibly get a hearing with fleas as a rival attraction? I have seen the Gravedigger fidget with his grave and skulls during Hamlet's Yorick-speech: such an important, almost formal, speech should rather be deliberately worked up to, and given every chance to get over. Stage business should always either help the words or be given an interspaced opportunity on its own. A Shakespearian play is a temporal sequence rising and falling; let one centre of interest subside and another come up elsewhere, one melt into the other, like waves. We want gentle, continuous variation and undulation, rather than a bubbling saucepan.

So the play must flow continuously. A Shakespearian play is crammed with significant action and continual movement, and these must be allowed to express themselves unhampered. Waits between scenes hurt the sequence and disrupt the curves. Scenes are not necessarily units at all. Often you can run two together, sometimes the drawing of a traverse during the action facilitates your progress. But do not end scenes with a black-out. A black-out has no curves of nature about it and is utterly non-significant. A Shakespearian play moves in waves of sound and rhythmic surges. These sounds reverberate. Cannon, given on a big drum, have no sharp edges: but pistol shots and cracking glass are alien to Shakespeare. You want nothing too sudden. A black-out decapitates rather than rounds off the action, whereas slow or fast curtains, or a steady lowering of lights, have gradation and significance. The general method will resolve itself into something of a permanent set for big

scenes played alternately with short front-scenes that allow for moving of furniture behind Shakespeare obviously wrote the plays on such a plan they fall naturally into this arrangement Do not let the act divisions, which may well be un-Shakespearian, hamper your plans, nor the scene descriptions – 'Before Gloucester's castle' or 'Another part of the street' these are late additions And do not think the front-scenes less important than others Usually they are most important, and often can be used for vivid short effects Alternate *short* flashes of opposing armies are often best done as front-scenes There is no looseness of construction in such The battle scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra* are no faultier technically than similar short views on a film to our film-trained eyes they should be strongly dramatic The whole play should, like a film, move smartly, but not without variation, significant pauses, tableau effects All the wider movements should rise and fall rhythmically especially the play's close

Intervals are necessary Two usually work well But they should be chosen to divide the play into significant movements, waves of action see my divisions of *Henry VIII*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* in the productions I describe later *King Lear* might be divided so that the tempest-scenes constitute a central unit Often in tragedy you will find your central scenes tend to present conflict, perhaps madness, sometimes followed by a temporary insecurity and lack of power in the protagonist, whereas the last scenes rise to the tragic sacrifice with more assurance and dignity

One last point If the play is to be divided into three movements, what use of music, if any, is proper before each? Music as an overture risks clashing with music – or the significant absence of music – during the action There can be no final rule *Twelfth Night* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* clearly allows you more musical latitude than *Hamlet* I think most Shakespearian tragedies are far better with a reserved use of trumpets or a low roll of drums, and such-like, at the beginning and end of any one division, whatever

the play and the particular movement seem to demand. Sometimes you can helpfully break the action between even minor scenes with something similar. But, sound-effects being so delicately and precisely used in Shakespeare, we must beware of introducing any that do not tone with the whole, or thinking we can easily fill up an ugly gap in the continuity of the action with music or sounds that are not helpful, when a little thought and rearrangement might obviate the necessity altogether.

### 3 MAINLY VISUAL AND SPATIAL

The time-sequence of a Shakespearian play generates a mental area, its motion creates something weighty and significant, from the flux and rhythm is built solidity. This I have called the play's 'spatial' nature, meaning its massed effects of imagery, symbols, persons, its colour. All which, in any work of great poetry, will have a solidity and richness far in advance of that given by lesser sorts of writing. So the mind feels the play both as a time-sequence and a vast spatial solid. But there is this difference. In actual fact the play is a time-sequence every time you read it, but its spatial quality is essentially and only mental or metaphoric. The time-sequence is as temporal as any sequence can be, but the spatial quality is not spatial in the sense that our back garden is spatial. Moreover, this spatial quality depends on and varies according to the recipient's receptivity: the sequence, as a sequence, does not. But the production of a play gives it exactly this spatial and visual actuality which before was indecisive. From which I deduce this most important principle: *the visual and spatial effects of production should primarily subserve the play's emotional quality and poetic colour.* They will solidify the spiritual, make real that extra dimension of profound and richly solid significance that great poetry possesses. Thus the visual side of production will very largely be concerned with the play's more significant, universal, and poetic qualities. It will be characterized by dignity, solidity, and permanence.

We proceed to apply this principle in turn to costumes, properties, lighting, and stage-settings

Wherever possible costumes should illustrate and point the play's meanings I have seen the Prince's entry in *Romeo and Juliet* after the fight in the middle action spoilt seriously by his standing bare-headed when all the others wore hats I have also seen the part ruined by the wearing of an Homeric horse-hair helmet The Prince symbolizes a very simple quality civic dignity and civic power He is dramatically most unwarlike, not any too good even in his own office as a disciplinarian, and utterly opposed to all armed wranglings He wields precisely the power of civil authority To make him walk the streets in a military helmet is as bad as sending him out hatless Indeed, far worse This is a very simple instance of how part of an elaborate production can fail through inattention to meaning I feel sure the costumes were all perfect as to period our care is too often misplaced In *Romeo and Juliet*, if you can afford it, the opposing houses should wear distinct liveries, and the Greeks and Trojans in *Troilus and Cressida* should likewise be distinguished, with close regard to the differing qualities of the two parties Once in a production of *Antony and Cleopatra* Cleopatra and her two girls wore Renaissance costumes and the rest, Egyptians and Romans alike, proper period dress of the ancient world Whatever the reason and authority for this there is a damning objection Cleopatra and her world should suggest something sensuous as opposed to Octavia's chastity Octavia must therefore be heavily robed, but Cleopatra, her girls and her slaves will contrast in sinuous part-nakedness even with the Roman men, still more with Octavia To have Cleopatra muffled up and the Romans bare-armed and bare-legged gets the contrast utterly wrong Dress is always important Watch the elaborate care with which Cleopatra calls for her regal robe when dressing herself for death, and let this grand and supernal chastity ('Husband, I come') contrast with her earlier appearance See Pericles, reunited with Marina, how he calls

for new clothes after his long night of despair. Where some violent effect of nakedness is needed, as with Edgar and Timon, it must be significant. I have twice seen a neat slip of a loin-cloth on a spotless body make Edgar look exactly like a young man going for a swim. Timon's prophetic rags, slight though they be, should fall with Hebraic and minatory implications. The worst and most ubiquitous error in production occurs in *Hamlet*. During the middle action he should look disintegrated, mad, pathetic and fearful all at once, or in turns. Usually there is no change to speak of from his first appearance, in spite of Ophelia's words, thus adding wilful distortion to inevitable complexity.

Considerations of period should, of course, normally give way to considerations of significance. The ideal will be a blend of some appropriate period (*Much Ado about Nothing* might go well in eighteenth-century dress) and interpretative meaning. We must be suspicious of any attempt to 'get back to the Elizabethans'—the ideal production today will be essentially a modern production. If we feel modern dress is not, except as an interesting and fertile experiment, finally suitable, that will be because Shakespearian costuming must be at some remove from the ordinary to help realize universal significances that clearly are not outwardly apparent in modern life. Observe how Shakespeare, for somewhat the same reason, usually removes, when he can, his action from England, he is to be contrasted with such a realist as the Ben Jonson of *Bartholomew Fair*. Costumes should assist the heroic quality of poetic drama. They may be right in terms of some reasonable period and yet fail disastrously. For example, I have watched a young actor in the final scene of Marlowe's *Faustus* struggling against an impossible Elizabethan costume—a short cloak pushed out behind by the sword he was, quite unnecessarily, wearing—a costume with none of the lines of dignity needed for so tremendous and difficult a scene. Indeed, I have never felt quite happy about Elizabethan clothes for Shakespearian tragedy. Most earlier periods of fashion appear to me pre-

ferable. A blend of modernistic freedom with correct period would often be, perhaps, best, since Shakespeare usually touches the geographic and historic quality of the period he writes of. In *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, the Roman plays, for example. The question of dignity raises that of richness. Costuming should be 'rich, not gaudy' not solely because Shakespeare's poetic people are lords and kings, but because the quality of their feelings and actions is rich and grand, and our visual-effects are to body forth this essential poetry. Of course, Shakespeare's choice of aristocratic persons is closely related to his sense of poetic sublimity which raises questions we must put aside for the present.

If dresses must be rich and dignified, it is equally important that all stage objects should appear weighty and solid. As far as possible they should always *be* what they represent. They should look important, and any not vitally involved in the action should as a rule be avoided. A throne on a dais, state chairs, tables, divans are all easy. But sometimes smaller objects do not receive proper attention. The three caskets in *The Merchant of Venice* are of rooted significance and should be dominating and solid-looking. The quality of importance conveyed by a stage object varies according to its apparent solidity and weight. Any smaller properties, such as the present or presents Ophelia returns to Hamlet, should be used significantly. Hamlet can look at them as he says, 'I did love you once'. That makes them seem rich and important. Just as apparent richness and weight has spiritual force, so any spiritual impregnation loads an object with visual richness. The action should be continually impregnating stage objects with significance. Crowns in Shakespeare are often important. Lear's crown of flowers, Cassius' wreath, Cleopatra's diadem, Queen Katharine's garland of immortality, all have variously toned symbolic power, and must look worthy of it. Everything and every person about the stage should look important, real, and solid, you must be able to weigh them with the eye. We shall argue presently that this demands a fairly simple and preferably dark background.



Many producers, however, love scenic alterations, which must be necessarily wrong, since the continually and subtly changing quality of the Shakespearian stream of event and emotion could never be given a correspondingly appropriate quick succession of changes in set. You may suggest that modern methods of lighting provide exactly such an infinitely variable means to atmospheric effect which brings us to my peculiar *bete noire*.

Modern lighting is, indeed, wonderful. But I oppose the electrician's claim to be properly more than a minor assistance to Shakespearian production. Today elaborate lighting tends to replace elaborate settings, and the one heresy is as dangerous as the other. The old-style realism reduced poetic drama to the level of our normal waking consciousness, modern lighting drags it lower to a sub-human world of twilight dream.

When I first was able to use a proper theatre for my productions I was amazed to find with what ease glorious effects could be obtained. A word to the electrician and the sky-sheet looks mystic and fearsome and any figure in front becomes a grim silhouette, another, and you have a blazing June day, another, and a blushing sunset. All admirable. Better than poetry, easier, immediate, faultless. But why do Shakespeare at all? Listen to Horatio's words:

But look, the morn in russet mantle clad  
Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill

What is the point of it all? Surely this to have certain significances driven into the mind through the poetic and verbal intelligence. That, we must suppose, is our aim and hope in attending to Shakespeare, and presumably it does is some sort of good. Now, whatever be the truth of a stage sunset, one thing is clear: any sort of producer can have it witched on, and any sort of audience can appreciate it. Whereas not one actor in a hundred can with full vocal intelligence and richness and perfect accompanying gesture speak those two simple lines exactly as we want them spo-

ken, and not one spectator in a thousand can fully appreciate them. Surely its facility outlines the essential frivolity of too much reliance on lighting. Nor can you have rich light-appeals together with other more concrete effects. The moment you begin to rely on lighting as a primary aid to significance, the actors begin to dissolve, gesture and facial expression lose value, words are blurred and, if all this were not so, the human mind, incorrigibly flirtatious always in matters of visual appeal, would swiftly prostitute its attention. I once saw the moonlight and music scene of *The Merchant of Venice* beautifully arranged with cardboard marbled fountains and silhouette trees and a delicate play of moonlight on Lorenzo and Jessica. It was exquisite, I was visually intoxicated. But I did not listen to the actors. Why, in any case, attempt to spoil these exquisite sonatas of coloured light with Shakespeare's heavy and laborious language? Let us have separate shows.

The light-expert paradoxically deals largely in darkness. He prefers a darkened stage, where he may the more effectively drop his pools of brilliance. You see a figure walking in twilight suddenly catch a steady ray from the wings, 'stick fiery off indeed' as he says an important speech, then turn, and with a couple of steps he is blacked-out, dissolved. Recently in the scene where Othello comes before the Duke I watched him stand in half-darkness saying quite important lines that accordingly lost power. Before the Duke's table was a pool of light. I thought, 'When the time for his big speech comes he will have to walk up those steps and get into that light', and he did. Nowadays instead of a level blend and diffusion you often get harshly distinct colours from the wings. You may see Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* take a warm red from one wing, turn and catch a green from the other. It is a pretty dream-world. So the dawn blushes in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, or trees in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shimmer against a moonlight that all but shames the moon. But you buy it all at a price.

The actors become dream figures, invisibility clouds ex-

pression Grouping becomes meaningless if you clearly see only the chief figures, their positional relation to the rest, always most important, is blurred or lost, and also the relation of every one to the stage itself, especially its centre. The sides of the stage become negative, with no clear-cut conventional limits. Solidity melts into fantasy, reality into dream. Nor is lighting so capable of subtlety as is usually supposed. It can, certainly, tint areas prettily, but Shakespeare's finer subtleties involve the interplay of persons. Lighting is crassly mechanical compared with the fineness of vocal or facial expression, the lift of an eyebrow, a touch of sarcasm in the voice, the twitching of a finger. Can a mechanical beam single out for emphasis minute significances comparable to these? Often a subsidiary person should register in such ways, but while the light expert rules production, the actor can take things easy, and usually does.

Even if you want to express darkness and mystery it should be done mainly in terms of visual positives. Ghost scenes are no exceptions. What makes the Ghost in *Hamlet* dramatically convincing? A green light? Or the expression on Marcellus' face, the gesture of Bernardo, Horatio's words

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,  
Together with that fair and warlike form  
In which the majesty of buried Denmark  
Did sometimes march? By heaven, I charge thee, speak!

I have never yet seen a performance of *Hamlet* where the actors facing the Ghost were properly visible. The Ghost himself I have known to wear an electric light in his helmet, which he switches off under his cloak when he is to vanish. I have seen him appear as a floating phosphorescence in mid-air, over an otherwise darkened stage, or stalk as a silhouette against a violet sky. Every time the trickery was pretty enough. Every time the chief actors had to speak in darkness. It got across satisfactorily, as such things always

do But did Shakespeare get across? Did the art of the actor stand any chance of showing the possibility of a greater effect, of something which has power not just to please with a transient titillation, but rather to transfix the listener and crucify him to an unforgettable intellectual experience? It is hard to reach that, but it is not impossible

Light variations can easily be unobtrusively used then they may be most helpful But they must remain subordinate For a night scene just a very little lowering of the lights and a slight dimming towards the wings gives all the hint you want Or you can always, if you wish it, start with the lights down and bring them up gradually before the first words are spoken You can, in fact, always quite easily play on your blues and greens for night-time, use your contrasts of amber and steel, warm up with reds when necessary, whilst keeping a properly diffused light, without even blurring the expression of an actor's face, with the full stage normally quite visible, indeed, without allowing the audience to think about the lighting at all All this is, of course, perfectly easy and effective There is no technical difficulty Fundamentally, the error is this the modern light-expert is regarding poetic drama as something of a dream-like fantasy instead of a revelation of an extra dimension of waking life He is using at the wrong thing<sup>1</sup>

And now for the settings The actors and all stage objects must not be dissolved into their background, but should rather stand out firmly That is why action is often most powerful in front of a plain black curtain black always shows up costumes and the actors' faces with fine effect However, a fairly dark neutral colour that takes various lights with differing results is possibly best for general purposes Imitation white stone or plaster, often used, does not throw out the face and figure nearly so well clearly, the

<sup>1</sup> Later experience has tempted me to adventure farther into spectacular lighting for certain scenes, especially broad effects of whitish (in practice steel and straw) light and shadow from the wings My objection to any emphatic use of blues and greens remains (1947)

face, which is of primary importance, cannot contrast with it. The street scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* often suffer in this way. Too much stage sky is likewise bad, and should not normally form a background for any lengthy and important speech. Antony's funeral oration can be seriously weakened by having the speaker's head melted into a bright sky. The actor's face and figure must stand out powerfully and significantly; too often he, and any objects about the stage, are weighed in the eye's balances and found wanting. The sense of richness given by heavy curtains is often invaluable. Once at a performance of *King Lear* one received no sense of richness and solidity until the actors took their calls at the end in front of a plain heavy curtain. The costumes leapt up into lively significance. It was the most remarkable moment in the play.

The setting can be as simple as you like, provided it looks rich and dignified. It need not be definitely localized. But few people can totally disillusion their minds of nineteenth-century realism. Antony's speech is, certainly, supposed to occur in the Roman Forum, the fights in *Romeo and Juliet* happen in a street, Desdemona is murdered in her bed room. But other scenes are indeterminate. Sometimes you feel the locality almost appears to shift during a dialogue. Certainly because Othello addresses 'yond marble heaven' in the temptation-scene of *Othello* that is no authority for labelling the whole scene 'The Garden of the Castle'. Hamlet apostrophizes the firmament from what you thought was an interior, and later points out clouds to Polonius from the place where the play has just been performed. It does not follow that the middle action of *Hamlet* takes place mainly out of doors, nor that you have to build or visualize a window. The Elizabethan theatre was, it is true, open to the sky; but let the modern actor point up at any time during the action, and the audience will accept the gesture provided the set does not present too meticulously realistic and detailed an interior. The normal scene headings in a Shakespearian text are never reliable; they are late addi-

tions It is foolish to list scene localities on the programme they really mean nothing The Shakespearian play is a continuous stream of action, thought, and emotion, with psychic rather than topographical panoramas it is not a miniature Cook's tour, nor a scenic railway of the sort you used to find in exhibitions If you want to help the audience on your programme - and they need all the help you can give them - tell them the story of the play Nor is this quite so easy as it sounds if you think it is, make a start with *King Lear* or *Cymbeline*, from memory

Usually it is best to have a more or less permanent full set interspaced with front scenes These latter are not necessarily the less important Indeed, where you have a particularly fine set-speech or any difficult incident or words that you want at all costs driven into your audience's minds, they are best thrown forward Such are Ophelia's description of Hamlet's changed appearance, the Queen's account of Ophelia's death, Mercutio's Queen Mab speech - this loses fifty per cent of its power if given, as it usually is, from a full and fairly realistic setting, Buckingham's arewell in *Henry VIII*, the Welsh Captain's dialogue with Salisbury in *Richard II*, Othello's description of the magic properties of the handkerchief Observe that these are not soliloquies Soliloquies are often best in a big set the actor can people the stage with his thoughts and movements They should not be given direct to the audience, though, when supported by listeners on the stage, a long speech often can and should be so given Prince Hal's 'I know you all' is clearly best done in the same set as was recently filled by his companions Later I show how Hamlet's long soliloquy can effectively use the full stage But the front-scenes I have indicated fall naturally into such arrangement, and their peculiar quality is enhanced by it I conclude that they were originally so conceived and planned Of course, where you get short flashes of opposing armies in turn, as in *Antony and Cleopatra* and the Histories, use of the front-cloth is inevitable and powerful you get a vivid sense

of conflict. Recently, however, I saw such action played from opposite corners of a somewhat realistic full setting, and the fault was obvious.

Anything like painted realistic scenery for the full sets is inappropriate. First, it pretends to be what it is not in a peculiarly annoying and unconvincing way that somehow makes its pretence the more to be deprecated the nearer it approaches success. The first time you see what looked like a solid pillar tremble in the breeze, your faith is ruined, and on the most important point. Your dimensional faith is at stake, and I am arguing that the third space dimension of solidity on the stage corresponds to the extra dimension of psychic reality unveiled, or created, by poetry, so that, if the seemingly solid pillar is suddenly seen to be flat, poetic drama becomes not a revelation, but a cheating deception. Today there is a peculiarly annoying trick of using painted curtains for front-scenes, with houses and streets falling in folds. This is not studied symbolism, but slovenly realism. Everything on the stage should seem to be doing well what it tries to do, and such a curtain is doing its job of representing a street horribly badly. A well-graced and richly-robed actor speaking solid and rich blank verse in front of a painted back-drop meagrely representing a house appears – or should appear – utterly and devastatingly incongruous. Besides, two utterly different conventions clash. Such attempts pin the action and words down to a wrong sort of exactitude and local reference quite alien to their nature. A street picture – whether full-set or curtain – across the stage forcibly and disastrously relates itself second by second to the words spoken in front of it, which may have nothing whatsoever to do with streets, and in any case involve, probably, more important issues by far. A fairly plain background is important not only in itself, but in that it allows all things said and done and all objects placed in front of it to be in turn exactly and precisely themselves, and not something else. For everything on the stage is modified by its relations to other visible objects. An action,

so played before a plain curtain, or an object so placed, is seen not in terms of some partial – or usually some utterly alien and cheaply undignified – context, but *sub specie aeternitatis*. That is why, to the trained eye, things in front of a plain black, or other reasonably dark, curtain are at once so deeply significant.

A certain dignity and richness of set is needed for all plays aiming at any kind of intellectual importance or spiritual profundity. Recently I saw O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* done with very cheap-looking realistic slum scenes. Walls trembled, colours were non-significant, all cardboard and paper in the worst traditions of the last century. It was utterly wrong. A degree of solidity, formalism, and rich though simple colouring is needed even here. Just as, however low the character an actor represents, there are certain ugly, because non-significant, postures and movements to be avoided. Especially in Shakespeare the spatial element of production has a precise and particular duty to subserve the rich quality and complex inward significances of Shakespeare's text, to help body forth the concrete nature of poetic, that is of real as opposed to realistic, drama, something more, not less, solid and dimensional than what you find in lesser plays.

Then, you will say, we should arrange some elaborately symbolical modernistic set? But such a set striking the right – or, more often, the wrong – note of the play may often likewise be highly dangerous. Such are nearly always designed by artists who are not deeply and lovingly versed in Shakespeare's peculiar symbolisms. They are often mainly angular, with cubes and steps and tiers and levels out of all proportion to the action, whereas a Shakespearian play is normally composed rather of rhythm, curvature, and gradation. Indeed, whatever sort of artistic setting you have, there is danger the moment it becomes an art-form in itself. A stage set should not make a pretty picture of its own. The empty stage should look formal and pleasing, but should seem to be waiting for the action to complete it. It



should not hold definite significance in itself. If you do work out an elaborated and exactly appropriate set such as that I describe later for *Macbeth*, it should so depend throughout on the action for its meaning that, until you see the play performed, it looks grand, possibly, but certainly incomplete.

You see, there is so much meaning in Shakespeare's text that if you load the eye with a new type of independent visual significance, even though it have a parallel correspondence to the play's quality, the mind cannot take it all in. This is what happens. At first the visual details dominate the attention and you don't get the play, the eye always being a more restful medium than the intelligence, then after a while you take the set for granted, see it no more, and watch the action only. The first part of the performance is ruined, the second not improved. Moreover, it is likely that such an elaborate set will not properly fulfil its function of throwing up the figures and especially the faces of the actors. The designer will have been thinking of other things. The only kind of elaborately planned set that is possible would be one that is all the time reacting closely on the text, one that so interlocks with – rather than runs parallel to – the action and words that the audience is continually being forced by it, not to neglect them, but to attend with new interest and understanding.

What, then, must we aim at? Something formal, pleasing, dignified. This will be fairly permanent. A plain curtain set disclosing a central platform with steps makes a good start. You can use a sky-sheet very often with good effect. You can break the back curtains with a couple of flats. For a peculiarly spiritual and metaphysical, as opposed to an historical, play, a couple of tall white cubes are sometimes helpful – it is wonderful what you can do by rearranging them and showing different edges. *King Lear* needs something of more irregular suggestion, *Twelfth Night* can use a definitely formal garden wall and flowers. The main principle of solidity, some degree of formalism, and permanency

holds good, infinite variations can be invented according to the play and the occasion. Mistakes are, however, only too easy. Once I saw a performance of *The Alchemist* done in a set with classic pillars, presumably because of the author's 'classical' theories, which struck me as most inappropriate to the play's harsh comic realism. For any tragedy, some underlining of centrality is nearly always most important: our central steps, for example, and small platform. This helps to universalize the action. But a word of warning is necessary here. I have seen Cleopatra with her girls on a big stage high on a raised level above tiers of steps. This was a permanent set for the early Egyptian scenes. The empty lower level was widely illuminated. She seemed lost in vast spaces. A figure too high up after a while loses dignity and significance, especially if her position is not referred to any persons below. Her chair should, I felt, have been below the steps, visual importance being closely related to weight, or the sense of it.

Because our main plan involves formalism and permanence, we will often deliberately avoid what seems at first a necessary touch of realism. Juliet's balcony and window will not be too realistically convincing, but rather solidly and plainly formal. As for Desdemona's bed, the more like a bed it is the less suggestion you can get of an altar. Universal as well as particular issues are involved. Permanence is in itself important: if you cut the big scenes too definitely into a street, Juliet's balcony, the Friar's cell, a bedroom, a tomb, you get separate bits of a story, in place of one vast dramatic statement. Often you find a hopeless succession of unrelated types of setting: plain, symbolical, and realistically painted front curtains, plain formal sets, symbolical-realistic sets, all sorts, in fact, with absolutely no unity of impact. There must be some noble permanence, reflecting the play's quality of wholeness, giving a sense of the end implicit in the start, and helping to build the final stillness of great drama that should crown and surround and interpenetrate the action. Nor will a permanent arch in one

convention with a succession of changing realistic pictures in another seen through it be of value you end by believing neither in the arch nor in the pictures Besides, any such elaborate and detailed variations should be seen always in front of, not behind and through, the enduring and enclosing whole which, fortunately, tends to preclude picture scenery For the spatial quality of the whole play must dominate in the permanent set, details of the story and changes of properties, which should be varied sufficiently to avoid monotony, significantly taking then place within and before it Of course, the two are not finally distinct, and it is because there are usually in Shakespeare certain recurrent, almost static, themes, leading colours of the play's patterned area, that an ideal set might be possible, as I have suggested, where certain symbolic permanences were solidified on a more elaborate scale, to blend variously with and at the same time brood over the action

#### 4 ON STAGE CONVENTION

The play's time-sequence generates a mental space-area, which in turn enriches the sequence, and so on infinitely The more you know of the end the more significant the beginning, and *vice versa* This oscillating reciprocity throws up the space-time quality of the result The mind is expanded and distended to a rich and complex apprehension in terms of such a flexible-solid art-form, it somehow focuses the universal in the particular and the infinite in the finite

This is done, as I have already demonstrated, by use of conventions, especially conventional limits Now whereas the literary play is limited mainly in time, so that we may not allow reasonings as to what happens before and after the action to disturb our view, the theatre works within a spatial convention as well, whose limits, conventionally accepted, open vistas of universal meaning All that is necessary is the one acceptance It is the same with the compressing line units in poetry, and with an actor's speaking control holds infinite resources So the stage limits are

themselves important. Kill or fog the limits and you tend to blur all grand suggestion in terms of those limits. That is why pools of light and areas of darkness are, normally, bad: you get no sense of a significant marked-out area. The audience need not see the whole stage clearly all the time, but they should be visually aware of it. They should feel a significant right or left, up-stage and down, especially a significant centre, and there should be a certain grand permanence limiting the whole. Only so can universal meanings get across. Supposing central steps are made to look too definitely like palace stairs, an actor standing on them no longer commands the universe – he is half-way between his bedroom and the front door. So a too realistic wall or house corner are not good: you feel there are more houses outside the wings, or perhaps a gate farther along the wall. This cuts across the meaning of stage limits. Within those limits you have your world: outside them you have, not houses or gates, but either one of two things closely related – (i) nothing or (ii) infinity, though under this heading I should have to include vague suggestion of any particular quality, as when, at a certain point in the action, one side of the stage is impregnated with associations of a particular person and his significance. You must be willing to use the whole stage frankly as a conventionally accepted medium. So often the producer tries to pretend that things are not happening in a theatre, whereas everyone knows they are. And it is just that that gives you your chance: for this knowledge is to be used, not fought against. Work with full recognition of the convention and you can pack the universe into your theatre, and so give Shakespeare his appropriate setting.

Conventionally limited, the stage becomes a magic area where every action and position is deeply significant. What is our real reason for producing Shakespeare at all? To hear the words? You could have those by sitting at home and reading. Elaborate visual effects of light and set? I have tried to kill that fallacy. No. Neither the spatial nor the

temporal in abstraction finally gets at the play's essential quality, which exists in mental space-time, and the vitality of any production depends on its power to project this space-time, solid-flexible, quality in terms of significant action. This principle, which includes both words and use of properties, involves too continually varied significance in movement and grouping, which in turn depends largely on a properly conventionalized stage area. The result will be a fusing together, a reintegration, of the play's two elements, temporal and spatial, particular and universal, to build a proper re-creation.

All poses and gestures should, in any straight poetic part, be picturesque and dignified.<sup>1</sup> The actor should normally look grand and heroic. Every movement should be significant. A stage fall should be rhythmic, not sudden. Recently I have twice noticed in professional productions a fall done in one sudden, straight, slanting, and signal-like motion, with the body left lying like a log, the feet together and straight. There is no natural gradation in that. A sway and a half-turn is more graceful, and the body should arrange itself in a picturesque position. Nor is it only a question of pleasing appearance: the sudden straight fall is quite negative and you hardly believe in it. A dying man must deliberately act his dying, which involves at least two movements. Similarly, a log-like body does not look so significantly dead as one with limbs more artistically deployed. Gestures also must be melodic, not angular, and normally not too fast or significance is lost. There is little need to stress this, since the average Shakespearian actor does his gestures well. One point calls for mention. Though the picturesque and statuesque are ideals constantly to be

1 In my own experience practising before a looking glass can be very depressing. You cannot see yourself in any particular action, since you see your own eyes, which are necessarily diverted from taking part in that action, and the whole result is at once dislocated. By arranging the glass so that your head is cut out of vision you can, however, get a fairly good idea of your poses, gestures, and turns.

kept in mind, yet you must avoid a flat and formal picture. I mean, a gesture made up-stage is as effective often as one across. Turning away from the audience is often useful. Often you can make a right or left turn with equal effect. One need not always kneel on the down-stage knee. A certain amount of such latitude in varying stage 'rules' – in themselves a necessary basis – helps to give depth and dimension to the action, whereas a rigid adherence to them may result in a stylized flatness. Wide and graceful gestures and picturesque positions generally are, of course, demanded not by any considerations of period, as is sometimes supposed, but to establish again the extra dimension of poetic drama.

At every moment the producer must have regard to the stage group. He should be continually at work to make grouping significant. I give a few simple instances. Three persons alone on the stage look bad if equidistant. Whether or not they are in a straight line, the equidistance itself leaves them in non-significant relation, whereas one facing two placed together is powerful, since you then get opposition, which implies conflict, that is action, and therefore drama. Even though the persons be friendly, this holds for conversation is itself a sort of conflict. Certainly if you get a quarrel, as with Brutus and Cassius, the opponents must face each other strongly and use the whole stage. Such considerations are important: the formality of grouping at every instant should be significant to the eye. If you disagree with these ideas, then have others, but do not leave these things to chance. In grouping a big informal crowd addressed by a central figure up-stage you must deploy your actors, not in diagonal lines sloping towards the central figure, but rather in small serried ranks parallel to the audience, close against the wing curtains, the ranks, of course, getting more central as you work up-stage. Entrances of important people should be given careful ceremonial, the stage filling from both sides to avoid a procession. These are only a few general and basic ideas, but the grouping should

be employed all the time with extreme additional subtlety to express the varying meanings of situation and action

Each part of the stage has its own significance. Exits, for example, should not be chancy things. Within a scene one side of the stage may quickly get charged with a certain association. You can spoil Mark Antony's entrance after Caesar's murder by making him come in from a conspirator-impregnated side. Or, if you disagree in this instance, you can find others where you must see that the principle holds. Entering from the centre has a precise significance: therefore you must plan carefully who is to enter there and when. A conventionally accepted stage is alive with meaning. In watching a student performance of *Berkeley Square* recently I was powerfully aware of the possibilities of stage convention. The lovers part tragically across the centuries, the hero leaving the eighteenth for the twentieth. No clever play on mechanical effects could have helped. But the girl stood with an Isis-symbol, a cross surmounted by a circle, while her lover, facing her, backed into the curtained wings. The lights were well up, you could see everything. The fine situation was allowed to play itself. The effect was overpowering. The stage wings became vistas of time, time was, for the moment, spatial. By using and welcoming the stage convention freely and simply you can do things impossible otherwise. How often is the central madness extravagant of *King Lear* properly done? Only an elaborated use of significant action and grouping can properly join with the words and thunder to build its towering fantasticality. The stage limits may create profound significance beyond themselves. See how Shakespeare uses the stage in *Macbeth*: how Macbeth's exit for the murder off takes him from the visible world into infinities of horror. Here we touch the reason why noises off so often hold infinite reverberations.

Suppose the Weird Sisters in the first scene of *Macbeth* are to vanish. A black-out does nothing: but suppose they are the vanishing. Say they speak their words in a still group: one standing, another kneeling close, the third

kneeling on the other side farther off They employ appropriately significant, melodic, and clearly visible gestures, such as the hand dropping from the wrist with forefinger pointing down and observe how much more effective that is in realizing the supernaturally evil than darkness and green lights At the close, the group is broken A twirl and a turn, proper gestures, the words pitched on the note of a whining wind, and the side figures go into different wings, the centre one exits centre You get not only the necessary effect of the three parting from each other, but also you see a solid group dissolve, melt into air, which helps to realize the idea of vanishing It is all done by positive visual suggestion in terms of the convention you get rhythm, gradation, significance Observe that you have used the full stage How does this compare artistically with the usual black-out? Or suppose Hamlet is to speak his long soliloquy dramatizing his own inactivity How is essential inaction to be got across by significant action? I describe my solution later

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Half the errors of modern Shakespearian production are due to misunderstanding of the nature of stage convention Nowhere is this clearer than with ghosts Producers are usually weak on *Hamlet*, but are worse with *Macbeth* Banquo's ghostly entrance at the feast I have seen represented with a magic-lantern projection on to Macbeth's cushion, or a sliding panel up the back of his throne I have seen Banquo get unobtrusively in place with his back to the audience and then show himself by turning his blood-bolter'd face, and afterwards scamper out at the wings with his head down, whilst the other actors crowd round holding out their cloaks Or I have seen the Ghost represented by Macbeth's own shadow cast on the wall, symbolizing the subjectivity of his fear, though I did not get the point at the time But, after all, what has all this - except perhaps the last - to do with Shakespeare? Or with drama in general?

Behind these tricks is the desire to make the supernatural convincing The producer completely ignores that willing



suspension of disbelief that is his right. In terms of stage convention he has to do certain very difficult things, instead, he wastes his time labouring to replace that convention with something quite superfluous that no one wants. For, suppose you did convince the audience that you had a real ghost on the stage, they would only be frightened and leave the theatre. You may call this an absurd objection. Well, say you arrange matters so cleverly that the Ghost actually seems to appear from nowhere and vanish. Then for the rest of the scene the audience are wondering how it was done and whispering theories to each other, with the dramatic tension quite killed. What of a method than which nothing can be more disastrous than perfect success? Indeed, you should always want your audience to see how effects are accomplished. If this spoils the effect, it is nearly certain to be a bad one. Moreover, the whole point and horror of a ghost in real life is that it looks just like a living person; except, I am told, that its movement makes no sound. It does not appear in a green light. Nor does it slide up the back of your chair. If it did, you would quickly polish it off. As usual, poetic drama turns out to be fundamentally more real than realism. Shakespeare's ghosts come in and go out, like all respectable stage persons, by the stage entrances. If grouping and good acting — by the ghost and, still more, by those who see it — do not make it convincing, nothing will, and if you want to suggest the infinite, as when a supernatural being vanishes, nothing will do it so well as the skilful use of the wings of a conventionally limited stage, since such a stage suggests the world, and its limits can always be used as frontiers of infinity.

The same principle of conventional acceptance applies to lights. They should be as dramatically powerful as possible, but not just a series of random sword-clinkings and vagabond noise. Often the best effects are attained by suggestion rather than actual blows: a weapon raised and held for a moment above a shrinking opponent in the middle of a *mélée* may be extremely effective. Othello has to strike

Desdemona if just before the blow he looks as though he is going to make it and just after both look as though it has been made, the blow will be dramatically convincing. An audience is very kind and sensible where conventional belief is demanded, but utterly heartless the moment you try to deceive them. That, in nine cases out of ten, is why they laugh at the wrong time.

So the whole performance should be constricted by a set convention which gives it infinite freedom. The stage becomes a world. For a grand ceremonial it should be filled broadly to the down-stage wings. A small stage thus used with a few actors gives a greater impression of size and numbers than a large stage full of actors less carefully placed, with a yard or so left unfilled at the sides. Opposing armies across a front-scene can give a grand impression if well spaced out, as when Brutus and Cassius confront Octavius and Antony. You do not need a vast army. In a full set four or five well-deployed figures can be arranged to lead the eye towards the wings, widening out and forcing the imagination to construct an infinite proportional expansion beyond the recognized limits, whereas a crowd of thousands in an out-of-doors pageant may well look meagre.

Today we have slight sense of the universal. Our typical plays are pieces of life torn from their context in the whole. But a Shakespearian play is not. It and its stage traffic in universality. So its kings should appear as kings of the whole world, its heroes, as mankind, its happy-ending romance becomes a dream of paradise, its tragedy, solemnizing the principle of sacrifice, touches ritual.

## 5

Whatever be our views about the theatre, it is clear that Shakespeare cannot be popular on the stage whilst we clog his plays by unsuitable methods. What is uniquely Shakespeare's own is, finally, his one hope of popularity on or off the stage. His plays cannot compete with the modern revue, nor with Maskelyne and Devant. Therefore we must let

Shakespeare speak for himself. The best sort of performance and by far the hardest to create, would make the play look as though it had produced itself. With care we must exclude all false short cuts to an outward appearance of elaboration, whilst aiming instead to exploit the inner core and centrality of the drama. But never must the production appear laboured or inhumanly intellectualized. The more graceful effects of poetic gesture should be shot through and varied, like Shakespeare's poetry, with touches of pure naturalism. Sets and properties must be so devised that they lend themselves easily to the action, and blend into the various supposed localities of the performance. There is no point in having Desdemona's bed central and looking like an altar, unless it also is very clearly known to be her bed. Shakespeare touches universality continually, but it is always the intensely human that he universalizes. I hope none of my remarks appear to argue that Shakespeare is purely a writer of classic formality. I stress most the elements most in danger of neglect. Shakespeare's art uniquely blends classic dignity with a romantic naturalism. Thus we forget at our peril. The Court scene in *The Merchant of Venice* has been played with dummied figures and masked faces sitting in a row. I cannot see Shakespeare's rich humanism in a masked face. Too often so-called 'symbolic' effects sit on a Shakespearian play like a monkey on a war-horse. Those I emphasize are rather the combing of its mane, the glint of steel on its hoof, the caparison to drape its flank. So we shall lead it out for some great actor, some new Garrick, Kean, Henry Irving or Forbes-Robertson, to bestride as never before was possible. Shakespeare's symbolic effects expand but never oppose nature, his world is no dream world, but a newly-wakened world, his is an inclusive transcendentalism. Therefore all our symbolisms must be warmly human, intensely real, though not realistic, drawn from, not imposed on, the action.

More if the production is to live, the producer himself must build and create during rehearsal, even sometimes

take suggestions from his cast, must use the varied interplay of personality at his disposal to the full. Every true performance, amateur or professional or mixed, is partly a communal creation. The producer must have absolute and final control over every detail, but he should use it with reserve. He should never work from an unalterable plan. Who ever painted a picture or wrote a novel in that way? So much depends on the actual personalities of the cast. In my own experience the best points often develop from an accident, some one else's good suggestion, or the necessities of a particular stage. For limitations, as I have continually urged, are usually capable of exploitation. Every true artist knows this. Shakespeare knew it. Art is not a luxuriating of fancy, but a bending of opposition and inertia to the creative will.

### III

#### SOME ACTUAL PRODUCTIONS

I NEXT describe some actual examples from my own productions that are relevant. First, I outline the development of Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, a part I have acted twice, and studied carefully, next, I refer shortly to my productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry VIII*, then, more fully, to those of *Othello* and *Hamlet*, with a final note on *King Lear*. I use the initials C, R, and L, for 'centre', 'right', and 'left'. Remember that stage right is the audience's left. Up-stage is away from the audience, down-stage towards them.

Hart House Theatre has a good fore-stage which suits Shakespeare well, and serves to make the change from auditorium to stage properly gradual and convincing. We ought perhaps before this to have discussed the kind of stage best suited to Shakespeare. However, what we do on our stage is more important by far than the type of stage we use: generally there is no choice. A blend of modernism and fore-stage seems best, such as you have at the Stratford Theatre. I am not myself in favour of an Elizabethan theatre to incorporate certain Elizabethan principles with our own seems healthier.

##### (a) Orsino in *Twelfth Night*

The current stage misconception that Orsino is a dull part is a symptom of our false valuations concerning dramatic poetry. Difficult it may be, but not dull. It is far subtler, for example, than the part of Sir Toby. Orsino starts as a highly romantic lover, with a fiercely passionate nature wholly dominated by Olivia. At his second appearance his words 'Who saw Cesario, ho?' following Valentine's remarks about Viola's advancement, already suggest a new emotional direction. Next, he describes how he has

opened his soul to the supposed boy. He talks a little glibly of his 'passion', when Viola reminds him of it, only next moment to revert at length to Cesario's suitability as a messenger. This he develops. Promises big rewards. Watch how fond he is getting of Cesario. Next we are to find them together listening to sentimental music. Orsino, I am sure, is by now far happier being sentimental over Olivia with the boy beside him than he would be if his suit were suddenly accepted. Notice with what new and contrasted cheeriness he enters 'Good-morrow, friends'. See how he looks forward to a feast of sentiment and song with Cesario. Last night it 'relieved his passion much' we can well believe it. He calls Cesario to his chair, and talks of the day when he too shall love, enjoying the thought. At the words 'the constant image of the creature that is beloved' his eyes can rest on Viola which points the quality of the whole scene. Orsino is unconsciously revealing, to us, a love he has not yet recognized. He asks how Cesario likes the music. 'It gives a very echo to the seat where love is throned'. Orsino, delighted, enquires if the boy has himself yet loved, and an exquisite dialogue of cross-purposes ensues. Orsino enjoys associating Cesario with love. The psychology is subtle and delicate. And somehow, listening to Cesario's replies, in a new and finer consciousness, he wistfully speaks the truth of his violent masculine passion for Olivia.

For boy, however we do praise ourselves,  
Our motions are more giddy and unfirm,  
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn  
Than women's are

To which Cesario replies 'I think it well, my lord'. Watch the contrast in this scene of feminine sincerity, marked by Viola's short replies, with masculine flamboyance. Feste arrives. Orsino tells Cesario to mark the song which he describes. It is 'old and plain', not 'light and flashy'. A significant contrast between the two sorts of love outlined in this scene. So together they listen to Feste, Viola deeply in

love with Orsino, Orsino not yet aware that he is already deeply in love with Cesario. He has an arm round the boy, holds his hand, listening to the love-poignancies of Feste's wavering melody, Olivia all but forgotten, for it is a nameless Love only that rules, Cesario by his side. As from a dream, where the close touch of Cesario plays a part, Orsino at last wakes. But I think Feste has to come and stand in front to remind him, coughs perhaps.<sup>1</sup> We need not fear comedy. Orsino and Cesario have to be recalled from the paradise wherein the undulations of music still hold their minds. Orsino is irritable. Tells them all to go.

Again he is alone with Cesario. His Olivia-passion, the cheating lure that vulture-like has fixed its beak in his consciousness, has returned. It rises almost as an undoubted duty.<sup>2</sup> He is tormented with carnal passion. If Orsino in deep thought crosses the stage before 'Once more, Cesario', you can get the change well underlined by action. His love for Olivia, he says, owes nothing to her wealth: it is purely her face and body he desires, or words to that effect. Observe there is no thought of anything deeper. At Cesario's objections to his insistence — notice how maternal Viola is compared with Orsino's almost adolescent unreason — and the apt reference to some woman whose love might with a like hopelessness be set on him, Orsino scoffs at woman's love, saying no woman could sustain so powerful a passion. Notice how this, in his changed consciousness, contradicts the spirit of his earlier admission of masculine inconsistency. He is irritable, angry, in that confusion where the baffled

1 And expects money. Why does Feste get so many tips? Other Shakespearian fools do not. Feste, compact of music and wit, distils the quintessence of the romantic comedies. He is the presiding genius of *Twelfth Night*. His habit of getting money out of everyone increases his dramatic dignity: he is *using* them.

2 Lust is a very conscious thing. The mind projects before itself an image not profoundly desired by the unconscious self and therefore finally unsatisfying, and next pursues it almost as a *duty*. Bradley has noted that Macbeth seems to kill Duncan as a 'duty', and I have elsewhere noticed the element of lust in the play.

mind struggles to unify and objectify its own conflicting levels of consciousness. Viola helps him. She tells of her supposed sister's love, and for the first time in this scene lets herself go.

My father had a daughter loved a man

Orsino grows interested. He returns to his chamber. She is kneeling by him. They are again almost in their old positions. Again he takes her hand. The accents of true love melt the mirage of his eye-lust for Olivia. "She never told her love." Orsino is again rapt in Cesario. But Viola has gone too far, and draws away, tears welling to her eyes. Turning from him, quickly she speaks: "Sir, shall I to this lady?" Orsino is baffled—both at the boy and at himself. Then he remembers his part of dramatic lover, recalls how he loves Olivia, and speaks perfunctorily

Ay, that's the theme. Give her this jewel. Say  
My love can give no place, bide no delay.

His mind is not in the glib words. Cesario goes out. If during the action somewhere some small object, a rose for example, can be impregnated with Cesario-associations and left lying about, Orsino can now stand watching Cesario's exit, then pick it up, look anxious, and, ending with a gesture of worry, go out deeply thoughtful.

In the last scene, where Orsino is rejected by Olivia, his threat to slaughter Cesario does not conflict with my reading. His Olivia-lust is a mad hunger (I, 1), and, when it dominates, all-powerful.

But this, your minion, whom I know you love,  
And whom, by heaven, I swear I tender dearly,  
Him will I tear out of that cruel place  
Where he sits throned in his master's spite.  
Come, boy, with me, my thoughts are ripe for mischief.  
I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love  
To spite a raven's heart within a dove.

The italicized words should be spoken with an agonized expression of inward conflict. Orsino recognizes the act as



one of mad 'mischief' he is spiting himself as well as every-one else. Observe, too, that there may be a certain element of jealousy of Olivia's share in Cesario's affections. Anyway, he is thwarted on every side, and mad with rage. When he knows the truth and Cesario turns out to be a girl, he should look as though scales of blindness have fallen from his eyes,<sup>1</sup> and Paradise is found at his elbow – and has been there all the time, could he have known it.

Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times  
Thou never would'st love woman like to me

Orsino speaks the final couplet, Viola is to be 'Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen.' It is a lovely ending. It is not a patched-up conclusion. Such slipshod phrases are thrown about with altogether too great a facility. From the very start this ending is prepared. Orsino, like Benedick, the chief persons in *Measure for Measure*, and Shakespeare's greater tragic figures, is shown on a voyage of self-discovery. He sloughs off the false, and is forced by the action to self-recognition. I think he should not be presented as a sentimental young man, but rather as a barbaric prince, somewhat Oriental, of a passionate and violent nature. His name is significant.

### (b) *Romeo and Juliet*

*Hart House Theatre, Toronto (1932)*

Our working out of the first fight appeared to me interesting. It is most important to get the contrast of the two houses and their retainers branded into the audience's mind, which cannot be done if the words are lost. The servants start brawling, but as soon as they cross weapons Benvolio enters. They pause at his words – or he beats down

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare's sonnets describe a man's love for a boy, such as Antonio's for Bassanio and the other Antonio's for Sebastian. The Antonio-Sebastian drama is a miniature *Othello*, and most powerful. To what extent may we relate the boys who turn out to be girls in the romantic plays to Sonnet xx? See my *Christ and Nietzsche*, ch. 14.

their swords Tybalt's entry draws Benvolio's attention, they speak and start to fight, the servants supporting them on either side, not actually crossing weapons, but shouting 'Down with the Capulets' or 'Montagues' Two officers enter, using staves to push back the fighters Now Capulet enters from down R His appearance helps the officers to check the noise and most of the action his words should get an exact hearing Then Montague enters down L They face each other across the fore-stage, each with his lady restraining him The tableau is important When they fall on each other there starts a general mêlée The two officers use action that suggests they are restraining Capulet and Montague, one between them, one outside Montague, to avoid too stiff an artificiality There are more shouts, and weapons cross There is more noise than ever before, thunderous For an instant you get a vivid picture on each side one of the servants sinks to his knee, an arm shielding his turned head from an opponent holding an uplifted weapon These are up-stage of Capulet and Montague and their wives, and partly obscured What you want is a definitely significant picture to build your effect subconsciously There is a great noise just before the Prince's entry Notice how the entrances are built up servants, gentlemen, lords, and the Prince, in order He enters from a platform C and speaks first from its central steps, the noise dwindles, then rises The fighting has stopped He carves a way down centre, the officers pushing people aside There are still murmurs He is right down on the words 'Throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground' There is complete silence A pause Then, 'And hear the sentence of your moved prince' He turns – the deliberate throwing away of stage presence by a turn up-stage underlines his absolute authority – and walks up-stage, followed by the officers Standing on the steps he speaks the rest, officers either side, the whole group, who have had time to get to new positions, listening many have their backs half turned to the audience, giving extra emphasis to the Prince's importance

Done like this, not a single line need be lost, there has been hardly any actual fighting, but the impression of a fight is strong. You get the fight by an undulating succession, increasing waves, curving down after the Prince's entrance - the usual Shakespearian movement. Such variation is far more effective than one undifferentiated mass of noise, since without variation there is no significance. Shouts and murmurs in waves are more effective than weapons banging. Usually the words are quite lost, people in odd corners of the stage clink swords in pairs, with no effect of two separate parties, nor any real effect of a fight, which cannot be got by just imitating fighting. The Prince comes on as likely as not from one side. You must use your conventional stage and get significant pictures from your groupings. There is usually no centrality about the set: it is just 'a street in Verona' and looks like one. That is, nothing has been done to spatialize the play's inward centrality, and without such interpretation the production is dead. The three entrances of the Houses and the Prince are all important: there is a patterned formality about them which must be not only preserved, but emphasized.

*Romeo and Juliet* presents a love union in contrast with family hostility and civil disorder which is clearly one variety of the music-tempest opposition throughout Shakespeare. The prologue correctly describes the play. *Romeo and Juliet* is more than a love-story. For the lovers' story is not only related to these outward disturbances, but their deaths prove sacrificially creative. The play has an exact and intricate pattern. These wider issues must not be slurred.

In this production we used no sky-sheet, only dark drapes with steps and a platform disclosed centre. On the central platform we arranged variously two white blocks, made to appear like solid rectangular cubes, over six feet long with a cross-section about eighteen inches square. For the street scenes one stood perpendicular, the other lay horizontal and diagonally towards the audience, both with corners and edges showing as much as possible. They gave just the touch

you want of rectangular irregularity suggesting city street and buildings. For the Capulets' dance they became pillars and were useful for Juliet's tomb. They appeared in all the full-set scenes, giving a helpful impression of permanence. The Friar incidents and smaller Capulet scenes were done with plain curtains. Juliet's potion speech is most effective with a minimum of furniture: we had one couch in front of a black curtain. Romeo's parting with Juliet we arranged poorly with Romeo going off on one side and a plain back curtain. I have seen it done better by the Ottawa Drama League with Romeo disappearing over a central balcony against a sky background. In most professional performances these inward and emotional scenes are hampered by alien effects. If Romeo ties a rope to Juliet's bed to help him down, and she throws it after him, it is all very convincing but somewhat disconcerting. Such action has no depth of inward significance at all, and therefore fights against the words, besides making you too conscious of windows, beds, dressing-tables, hair-brushes, and so on.

In the central fight scene observe that Mercutio and Benvolio must really start in ill-humour with each other. It is a hot day. They are bored and quarrel irritably about each other's aptitude to quarrel. The humour of the situation should be unconscious on their part. They are shown in a mood that makes Mercutio's later actions reasonable. An interesting point arose in Romeo's attack on Tybalt. In contrast with the earlier Mercutio-Tybalt duel, Romeo rushes on Tybalt in a blind frenzy, disarms him with a sword and stabs him with a dagger. At the dress rehearsal I found I had no time or space to draw the dagger. I just pushed at him with my hand, his body obscuring the action. Though I clearly could not have drawn the dagger, no one observed anything wrong, and we did it that way each night, without losing the effect. In this scene, when the Prince arrives, he is better not speaking from the centre steps. He has done that once. It is better to have him down centre somewhat, in the middle of the general distress, as it were,

drawn down from his authority by this disastrous civil disorder that has ended in his own kinsman's death. So he stands, surrounded by figures pleading for forgiveness or vengeance, Lady Capulet kneeling over Tybalt. He is a symbol of Verona, torn, distracted by internal conflict.

Observe Romeo's growth during the play. First he is a love-sick boy, next an ardent and successful lover, next, a hero suffering for support of his friend. In his 'banished' scene with the Friar his emotion is violent, and must be given with *rhetorical* force and abandon. He must on no account sob like a big baby — he so often does. This is the sort of situation that only poetic drama can properly tackle — we must let it do so. At his re-entrance into the action in the Mantua scene he should show a new maturity and manly dignity — the wearing of a cloak and top-boots — a small but effective touch — strikes the right note. His soliloquy recounting his wondrous dream must be given every chance — this is all clearly to be done on the fore-stage. The dream curiously forecasts *Antony and Cleopatra*, touching a sense of love's victory beyond death. Compare Romeo's 'that I awaked and was an emperor' with Cleopatra's 'I dreamed there was an emperor Antony'. Romeo's hearing of Juliet's death is best taken with a terrible quiet and a mad glint in the eye giving a new depth to contrast with his earlier abandon. His description of the Apothecary is very important, and should be done slowly. New worlds are swiftly swimming into his ken. Observe how deepest tragic experience at once, and for the first time, opens his eyes to suffering and impoverished humanity. Lear's purgatory is forecast. He now recalls having seen the Apothecary, partly because he needs him, partly because his consciousness is tuned in to such things, unnoticed before. That is, Shakespeare uses the Apothecary to strike the required tragic note. Watch how Romeo's values are reversed during his conversation with the man — the world's gold becomes poison, life a sickness. Even so, beyond pleasure himself, he takes a selfless pleasure in the Apothecary's advantage. 'Go,

buy food and get thyself in flesh' This is the first purely selfless thought he has uttered Juliet's death has made a Christian of him Of course, all this must be stressed and done simply we must not deseciate it with attempts to photograph Mantua

When Romeo next enters before the tomb with Balthasar his heavy step and set looks must express his deadly intensity and rigid course He warns his servant from impeding his almost maniac determination Gives him gold, says farewell kindly, again kind with an all but inhuman and last-moment charity, like Timon with Flavius In these latter scenes Romeo should certainly wear a heavy cloak it gives him the extra power and presence that he needs We are in the world of *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Timon of Athens* Alone on the stage he turns and walks up towards the tomb, a figure of tragic destiny It is a tragic ascent

The last scene of *Romeo and Juliet* is nearly always arranged badly The full set usually shows the interior of the vault For much of the scene this at first sight appears to have certain cheap advantages, for the end it is weak and for the beginning ruinous Romeo enters far up-stage beyond a grating, he and Balthasar two distant silhouettes His first speeches are thrown away the picturesque adventure instead fills the eye with tawdry enjoyment The business with Juliet is done centre-stage easily enough Finally you have the entry of Capulet, Montague, and the Prince This is the third such formal entry Here it is not very helpful to have the final group within the tomb The final speeches are far better spoken from outside it, from the outside world, overlooking the lovers' tragedy, yet looking up to it nevertheless as to a sacrifice The Prince's reference to the sun's overclouding comes better this way than if they were already engulfed underground, though this is a minor point

The tomb should, then, be up-centre and raised Romeo entered, in our production, down L on the fore-stage this throws the intensity of his first speeches down close to the audience As he walks up to Juliet, he is, as it were, climbing

not descending. The mattock-business of the opening of the tomb we did simply by suggestion – though Romeo had an actual mattock – and the drawing of a curtain a little extra-realism could be easily arranged, if wanted. The middle action is at least equally good this way, and the final group better. The whole scene, indeed, acts itself. It might have been written for such an arrangement, and, as a matter of fact, was. However, you nowadays see it done differently, all to get a pretty effect of gratings and silhouette figures against a night sky and perhaps a twinkling star disjuncting the body of the drama and pushing it out of shape.

The conclusion should be stately and ceremonious, with no hurry though the Friar's speech should be condensed by cutting. We cut also from Juliet's potion speech to Romeo's, Mantua scene. For a production done under un-professional conditions it is always best to cut freely and, if possible, find one such large cut that does not tangle the pattern, generally in the latter half. We had no music, unavoidably but certain simple sound-effects at act beginnings might have been profitably devised. The play, if I remember rightly, was divided into four movements, intervals falling after the Balcony scene, the death of Tybalt, and Juliet's potion speech or, if not, that is where I should put them now.

### (c) *Henry VIII*

*Hart House Theatre, Toronto (1934)*

*Henry VIII* is a massive play. It is a fitting – one might say the only fitting – culmination of Shakespeare's work. The play was given in three acts. Each movement we preluded with music suggesting, for Act I, tragedy, for Act II, a quality pre-eminently martial and kingly, for Act III, a joyful solemnity. Certain other scenes were given a few bars appropriate to what followed. I tried to play on a recurrent king-theme *motif*. The saturating Christian quality of the play was reflected into anthems and hymns.

As for sets, we used mainly the central platform and steps between black curtains. On the platform was a table and

chair, and behind small red curtains disclosing an attempt at a stained-glass window. This appeared to blend neatly a permanent and ecclesiastical formalism with historical realism. In front we used thrones, chairs, tables. Once we had the red curtains drawn and a heavy lighted candelabra on the platform for the scene where the King hears of the birth of his child. For the Queen's trial the central platform was filled with standing lords and a bench of bishops below on the steps, the Cardinals' thrones were up L to LC and the King's R. Down L was the Queen's chair. This arrangement distinguished clearly between the King's and Cardinals' authority, and gave the Queen an important cross to a good position between the King and Cardinals for her long speeches, all which has obvious advantages. Buckingham's farewell speech was spoken, necessarily I think, on the fore-stage.

Three scenes are worth describing in some detail. The first is that where the King discovers Wolsey's duplicity and leaves him to the merciless baiting of hostile lords. My arrangement well illustrates what I mean by 'significant action'.

The set shows a chair and table on the platform in the alcove, and another chair and table down R. Throughout the scene we use the platform as peculiarly Wolsey's, its centrality and height relating to the here dominating matter of his high position, the right of the stage belongs to the King. Off-stage L is imagined as Wolsey's world, off-stage R as the King's.

The four lords are discovered discussing their grievances and rumours of Wolsey's impending disgrace. Seeing him coming L they draw down L on the fore-stage. Wolsey crosses R, dismisses Cromwell, who goes out L, and sits at the table down R soliloquizing. Appropriately he sits in the chair later to be used by the King as he plans how to rule the King's affairs. Wolsey next goes up C to the other chair and gets busy with his papers, the movement toning with his unrestful state of mind. The King enters R with an



attendant lord, sits by the table down R, and addresses the four lords who have advanced. Two of them go to wake Wolsey's attention to the King's presence, and then go R. Wolsey comes down C. He faces the seated King and three standing lords R, who are grouped like a tribunal, the two other lords are L. He is, as it were, surrounded by cold hostility on both sides as he receives the King's anger. All but Wolsey exit R, the two lords L passing behind him up-stage, leaving him high and dry, so to speak, as he comes down looking at the papers that have ruined him, given by the King. Wolsey, alone, first sits R, sees the whole disastrous situation, and in despair rises and retires up to the alcove, standing on the steps, back turned. The lords, the Lord Chamberlain, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Surrey, re-enter from the King's side R. The Lord Chamberlain and Norfolk get L of Wolsey and demand as from the King his seal of office. Wolsey, who has come down the steps C with great dignity, refuses, then turns to re-ascend. Their words bring him down again. For a while he maintains this central position, the lords taunting and insulting him, two on either side. Surrey, particularly fiery, has moved from R across Suffolk to RC. From there he makes a particularly insulting remark about Wolsey's supposed amours and then turns away up-stage R, the line lending itself to just this movement of disgust. He is joined there by Suffolk, who walks up R of the table. Wolsey with great dignity crosses R to the table on the line. 'How much, methinks, I could despise this man.' This movement suggests his yet intact outward confidence, since he goes deliberately to the side – the King's side – from which the insult came, yet suggests subtly his need of chair or table as support. Observe, too, that he has given up his central position. The placing now is Wolsey standing by the table R, slightly more central than the two lords Surrey and Suffolk behind him up-stage R, and Norfolk and the Lord Chamberlain L. The Lord Chamberlain stands well away, aside from it all, to mark his more sympathetic and kindly nature. Now the other three lords volley a

succession of charges at Wolsey Surrey and Suffolk come centre from behind Wolsey, each on his first words, in a circular movement, ranging themselves with Norfolk in a diagonal line. The accumulative nature of their accusations is underlined by one following the other, and the coming round from behind gives a touch of meanness to their bullying attack. At one particularly crushing charge Wolsey sinks in the chair. Notice how Wolsey's central dignity is all gone, how he sits crushed on the King's side of the stage where he was recently complacently planning England's future, and how the lords are now one combined force bearing down on him from one side and shutting him off from both the platform and his own world. L. One of them might now ascend the first step. Finally the lords exit R as before, passing up-stage of Wolsey. Anything slightly undignified in their thus trooping off in single file tones with their behaviour. Surrey makes a final violent expression of scorn as he passes, the Lord Chamberlain, the last to go, hesitates, looks both sorry and baffled, and passes out.

So Wolsey is left alone again. His soliloquy is spoken in the chair. Cromwell enters L, and gives his news turned away down L. At 'That's news indeed' Wolsey stands, only to sit again at 'There was the weight that pull'd me down'. At his assertion of loyalty Cromwell falls kneeling by Wolsey's chair. Wolsey speaks sitting, his hand on Cromwell's shoulder, but rises on the line 'Say, Wolsey that once trod the ways of glory', Cromwell still kneeling. At 'Pruthee, lead me in' Cromwell rises. They go up C. At the words, 'Farewell the hopes of Court' Wolsey turns and looks towards the empty chair R. At 'My hopes in Heaven do dwell' Wolsey and Cromwell are C, backs to the audience, Wolsey looking up toward the stained-glass windows. The scene then closes.

I next notice the scene where Queen Katharine has a vision of Paradise. This, Shakespeare's last play, shares with the others of his final period a strong religious and mystical quality, here for the first time explicitly Christian.

The sick Queen is discovered in a chair. RC with two

girls and her gentleman Griffeth. The lights are slightly dimmed with a predominance of red to create a sunset effect. Griffeth speaks his description of Wolsey's end. The Queen asks for music. Griffeth makes a gesture down L and with draws there with the two girls, as solemn piano music starts. As soon as the now sleeping Queen is quite alone violins are audible coming over the solemn music which dies down. Faint voices are heard, singing an Easter Alleluia hymn. The voices and violins gather power as three white-robed figures enter from either side. The lights come gradually up. The six, themselves silent, execute a complicated dance, and curtsey to the Queen in pairs. At the climax, when the lights and singing are at their height, they offer her the garland of immortality. The lights are now a white blaze on the snowy figures. The Queen holds out her hands. Then the figures depart, voices and violins growing softer and lights dimming down to their original strength and colour. Finally the solemn bars from the piano come up again and all is as it started. The Queen calls, Griffeth and the girls go to her, having seen and heard nothing.

We amplified Shakespeare's directions to the extent of varying the music but the effect was essentially true to them. The use of lights was unorthodox: a sleep-vision is nearly always done in half darkness. I chose the opposite, showing off the vision against waking life as daylight against dream. Whether or not we believe in any paradise it is clearly the producer's business to make such scenes convincing, and a paradise of green or blue lights is not attractive.

The whole last movement is optimistic, towering up to the final crest of prophecy. In the earlier parts we had tragedy heavily toned with religious consolation: see Buckingham's and Wolsey's last speeches. Our third act is happier. In Queen Katharine's vision we face the radiance of eternity, in the coronation of Anne Bullen and the christening of Elizabeth we face rather a radiance temporal and earthly. To point a unity here I used the same

Easter hymn for Katharine's vision and Elizabeth's christening procession. Easter associations are appropriate to both resurrection and birth. If you object that the hymn was a Protestant affair out of period, we could argue that the play significantly contrasts Cranmer with the cardinals. In this last act Cranmer becomes most important: the three tragic persons were excessively proud and fell, Cranmer is excessively humble and rises. We have three processions in the play: first, Buckingham's execution, second, Anne Bullen's coronation, third, the christening. The first two went across the fore-stage, somewhat similarly, to help stress their comparison and contrast as noticed by one of the choric gentlemen in the text. Our last procession gained an extra dimension of importance by coming up on to the stage through the auditorium.

For our final scene the Lord Chamberlain is addressing the two porters on the fore-stage before a plain curtain. Then from the back of the auditorium the joyful pealing of church bells breaks out, and the procession appears singing the Easter hymn. As it reaches the fore-stage the curtain opens, discovering the full set with a few persons grouped on both sides. The Duchess with the child Elizabeth under the canopy goes up the steps C with Cranmer, the rest of the procession goes mostly L, but some R. This leaves empty spaces R. The Lord Chamberlain speaks his formal salutation down L. Next there are trumpets and the King's guards enter R, and then the King with more lords and preceded by two heralds walks up C to a few bars of the king *motif*. Notice that the empty spaces are now being filled. The deliberate and gradual filling of such spaces in a scene of pageantry is effective. You get a sense of mass by watching the building piece by piece, and one of plan and purpose behind that lends the whole significance. In this instance you have seen the Alleluia procession arrive, leaving Cranmer and the child in the centre, and, as the waiting gaps, stage grouping, which give you a sense of something lacking, are filled at the King's entry, you watch royalism complete.

ment religion. The interplay of Church and State is vital in *Henry VIII*. So now the King ascends the steps, stands opposite Cranmer, and kisses the child, and then starts to descend, taking Cranmer's hand. But Cranmer holds back after coming down one step and asks leave to speak. This gets the King a step lower than Cranmer, who remains high and central for his prophecy, the culmination of the whole play and, indeed, Shakespeare's last word to the world.

(d) *Othello*

*Hart House Theatre, Toronto (1934)*

We divided the play into three movements, one leading up to Cassio's dismissal, the second composed only of the big temptation scene, the third, the rest of the play. That is, the hatching of Iago's plot, the success of it, the result of it.

The early scenes were done simply, but a difficulty arose at the change from the Duke's council-chamber to Cyprus. There was furniture to be moved. The gap was filled by an interesting expedient. You need something here to indicate and help realize the change in locality, and the tempestuous voyage of Othello and the rest is of great importance and needs underlining. Its symbolic force is this: Othello and Desdemona conquer adversity. They arrive safe over hostile and tempestuous seas. The Turks are drowned and Othello, meeting Desdemona, is shown victorious in both war and love. All this contrasts with the more fatal spiritual tempest raised later in Othello's mind by Iago. So we arranged a miniature orchestra of sounds, using a wind-machine, a surf machine, a thunder-sheet, a big drum, and a bugle. All lights are down. Waves of elemental conflict crash in the darkness, and through them comes a faint strangled bugle, again, waves of sound booming and thundering, dying and rising, a crescendo of fury, but next the bugle comes strong and clear over the tempestuous waves, suggesting the victory of man over hostile nature. All this lasts quite a while and is very loud. Meanwhile the curtains have been drawn and the lights now go up on Cyprus.

On the central platform there is a plain balcony against a darkened sky-sheet. On this men are watching the waves. Montano strides about anxiously below. The lights are still somewhat dimmed. News arrives by hurrying messengers. All is waitlike preparation and bustle. Intermittent wind and surf still sound. A messenger tells of the Turkish disaster and of the arrival of Cassio's ship. It is growing lighter. Cassio enters L, thronged by citizens. He wears armour and a helmet. Cries of 'A sail, a sail!' are heard. Soon – not directly – after, guns thunder a salute. Observe that Cassio's arrival was not so heralded beforehand. A messenger goes off to enquire of this new arrival, while Cassio tells of Othello's marriage, emphasizing Desdemona's excellence. The messenger returns, saying it is she who has arrived. Cassio in highly figurative language imagines her divine prerogative of safety against tempests. He prays for Othello, speaking of him as of a god coming to breathe life-fire into the Cypriots. See how the glamorous situation is being built, heaped up, one entry on another. The lights are well raised. Now Desdemona, Emilia, and Iago enter from the centre platform, and descend the steps, holding their raised position for a second or two while the crowded stage kneels at Cassio's command and Cassio speaks his welcome. Watch Desdemona descend, immortal beauty untouched by storm. The lights are bright on her. No more wind and surf is audible: the tempest is being crushed by human excellence. Now again, in quick succession, cries of 'A sail, a sail!' and guns. Cassio was unannounced by such effects, for Desdemona they were separated by a few lines, now they come both at once. While they go for the news, Desdemona talks playfully with Iago – an exquisite contrast and delicate irony. She is gay and colloquial. A divine domesticity breathes from her. A trumpet sounds: notice how this third exit has this additional ceremony, by contrast lifted high and rising over the others. 'The Moor – I know his trumpet!' Cheers sound off. Desdemona runs to the steps. Attended by soldiers Othello appears up-centre on the plat-

form, with steel breastplate and tall Viking helmet, and stands amid a din of welcome from the now packed stage, an arm raised both in recognition and to command silence. There is next utter quiet. He starts to come down, and holds out his arms as Desdemona steps up to his embrace. Notice that she, no 'moth of peace', goes up to meet him, up to his glamorous world, he does not descend all the way. 'O, my fair warrior!' The light falls brilliant on them, central.

Observe how the scene progresses in waves, like the first scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, each entry more striking than the last. Consider the skilful technique by which normal time is telescoped to make such a swift-gathering crescendo of dramatic effect, depending as it does on the arrival of several ships, possible. My arrangement brings out only what is already in Shakespeare. The poetry here is highly decorative and richly inflated with universal significance. As Othello and Desdemona kiss, Iago, down L, mutters 'O you are well tuned now.' It is a great scene but its grand artistry can be only too easily slaughtered by inconsiderate production.

After Othello's exit we showed Bianca giving the glad eye to Cassio, who reciprocates her interest, and shortly after introduced a dance for her and two others. My reasons were (i) the part of Bianca needs building up, and it is as well to let the audience know who and what she is or her later entry loses force, (ii) in this way we help to illuminate the part of Cassio, his attractiveness and moral laxity, and (iii) it all serves to create a sensuous suggestion, in tone with the change in locality, that considerably helps the later action.

The Herald announces the general holiday on the fore stage. Then the curtain discovers our recent full set, now with a table and benches. L. Montano, Iago, and others are lounging about. The dance starts, given by Bianca and two girls. It is a southern riotous affair with tambourines. Bianca follows with a solo turn, very colourful and sensuous. All this lends point to Othello's warning to Cassio - they enter down R after the dance is over - about over-stepping

the limits of merrymaking Cassio's drunkenness follows the easier When Othello enters after the fight you can get a good point by letting him stalk about in dead silence Seeing Bianca solicitous for Cassio, holding on to him perhaps, he gives her a stony and puritanical stare, as though his high morality is doubly shocked by scenting sexual in addition to imbibitory vice All this shows the kind of additions I defend unless they seem to be doing quite a lot of useful things at the same time, they are probably unsafe

We come now to the important middle act here we have some very interesting examples of significant action The set shows the steps and central platform between dark curtains Over the balcony is thrown a rich purple cloth The sky is bright behind On the main stage we have two light-grey seats and a table with a golden tasselled cloth R, and a colourful divan L On the table are papers, ink, and pens Up to now Othello has dressed in European style, from now onwards he wears an oriental costume, a purple gown with, in this scene, a loose gold and red robe

Desdemona, Emilia, and Cassio are discovered talking Just before Cassio's exit (R) Othello and Iago enter on the fore-stage down L This entry with Iago tends to impregnate stage-left with suggestion of Iago and render it slightly hostile to Desdemona, who will throughout exit and re-enter R Othello hears Desdemona's solicitations, sits at the table R on the inside chair, and there succumbs to her caresses and gives in The ladies exit R Iago crosses R behind Othello, gazing after them He is now outside the table Othello is signing papers The action of this long scene will now show us Iago driving Othello from up-stage R to down L The table suggests the civilized Europeanized Othello, the divan L something of oriental passion Iago will exit and re-enter L

At Iago's first words Othello continues with his papers Afterwards he puts them down Iago sits R on the outside chair at 'My lord, you know I love you' Othello stands at 'By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts', Iago stands and draws



back Othello's 'Ha' is uttered as he strides suddenly C, a very significant move according to my plan Iago follows close up with 'Beware, my lord, of jealousy' Othello is C or RC at 'O misery', then, recovering, turns to Iago, and speaks his reassurance, lays his hand on his shoulder, crosses below the table to the far seat R, sits down, and restarts on his papers This long walk indicates a strong recovery, yet the fact that he has gone too far and finds he now has to re-gather his papers for his new position at the outside chair faintly reflects the false excess and uncertainty of his assurance Iago now comes up close, kneeling on the other more central chair - the one Othello first occupied - and continues, Othello glancing sideways nervously as though afraid of having his confidence blasted by an awkward truth Quickly he is standing again, Iago also, solicitous Othello, now very perturbed, asks to be left alone Iago goes out L Othello with steady deliberation crosses to the divan and stands by it as he considers his wife's possible unfaithfulness Up to now Othello has been comparatively subdued in word and action compared with what follows later Notice the acute psychology by which terrible news is shown as not having its full effect at the start it has to work in the constitution Iago's lines on 'dangerous conceits' suggest as much So Othello's soliloquy is meditative His mind is numbed, the full pain not felt yet

Desdemona re-enters RC with Emilia, there is the short conversation and the dropping of the handkerchief Othello and Desdemona go out RC Othello can stop, study Desdemona's face, and then go out alone, she wondering at it Emilia, left alone, picks up the handkerchief Iago returns and gets it from her Dismissing her, he goes down L for his soliloquy about dangerous conceits He watches Othello stride back across the platform, and speaks his 'mandragora' lines, standing in the position, down L, where he is finally to drive Othello He waits, his back half-turned to the audience, mesmerizing, drawing Othello, who now re-enters C descending the steps 'Ha! ha! False to me?' Iago

gets up-stage, L of Othello, on 'How now, General, no more of that' Othello should already show a great increase in passion a few minutes off the stage can very often be allowed to correspond to hours

Othello now speaks his first words 'Avaunt, begone' from the steps, with great, though controlled, intensity, then crosses Iago to LC on the words 'What sense had I' He has come a little down-stage, and maintains the position for 'O now forever' facing diagonally L away from Iago During his next violent speeches he turns on Iago C, his wrath rising, and attacks him, throwing him to the ground close to the table, then walks back L and paces down stage, then up, distractedly, on 'I think my wife be honest and think she is not' He is violently agitated Observe that this section of the scene is using mainly the left of the stage as the first part of it used the right Iago is driving Othello down-stage, and to the left At 'Death and damnation' Othello sinks on the couch the first time he has actually touched it Iago draws close, telling him of Cassio's supposed dream Othello is projected by this down C The movements are getting more violent and rapid in succession Iago quickly follows up on his L and drives in the final nail with his words about the handkerchief This finishes Othello He crosses to the down L corner 'Now do I see 'tis true' He blows his love to the winds and invokes hell-vengeance

The scene was rounded off by Othello striding back to he steps RC on 'Blood, blood, blood!' Iago follows to LC Both pray to the marbled heaven of the sky-sheet Othello crosses Iago L as he asks him to go with him 'aside' and find swift means of death' for Desdemona, then stops, turns, and puts his hand on Iago's shoulder 'Now art thou my lieutenant' Iago kneels as the curtains close Othello's cross shows they are to exit L, that is, away from Desdemona to the Iago-world Iago's kneeling gives a useful touch of Mephistophelean servitude

No doubt all this sounds uninteresting, but it is not so in performance Notice that for this crucial scene we have

used the whole stage, squeezing out every drop of its potential significance as a conventional area for the first half, the right, for the second, the left, and for Othello's middle exit and entrance, the centre. Iago's positions are usually up-stage of Othello, but he keeps drawing level, of course. Othello does most of the moving, impelled by the words of an outwardly passive Iago. I considered the possibility of keeping Othello central with Iago weaving spiders' webs round him, which would mean Othello moving at first violently and far, then less and less. It has points, and justification in the play's imagery. But I feel it would be less effective. Othello would have to become more still as his language became more violent, which is illogical, or, at the least, extremely difficult. Also it might seem too definitely part of a studied scheme. Iago is on the whole the motor force behind a violent and active Othello, and that my arrangement reflected. Also you get the change in Othello spatially embodied: up R to down L. Movements should never appear artificial, but should grow naturally from the producer's spontaneous visualization and during rehearsal. Observe that, in contrast to the alternative arrangement, there are none here that are not dramatically of a very obvious sort, but they are used significantly. Such a blend is exactly what you want. For the audience need not be aware conceptually of the intellectual plan, which should work rather as an unnoticed auxiliary.

Observe how the handkerchief is Iago's conclusive point, and how this is underlined by the central down-stage position and Othello's final cross to the down L corner. Our third act starts with the scene where Othello demands the handkerchief from Desdemona. Its peculiar quality and importance necessitate a plain fore-stage arrangement. Every word must be driven in and the attention concentrated.

In poetic drama the action often crystallizes into something or person suggesting the universal or supernatural. Such are, in Shakespeare, the Ghost in *Hamlet*, the Wound

Sisters and their Apparitions in *Macbeth*, the especially vigorous and elemental tempest in *King Lear*, the squadrons of blood-drizzling soldiers in the sky in *Julius Caesar*, the mysterious music in *Antony and Cleopatra* Or, to take some more modern instances, the Severn Bore in *Nan*, the carpet in *Hassan*, Joan's voices in *St Joan*, the South-sea island in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, the silver bullet in *The Emperor Jones*, or the Wild Duck in Ibsen's play Some thing, I mean, that binds the action and about which the action lusters, or which at an especially poignant moment helps to crystallize and universalize it A nature-force, or a god-force, or a magic-force Or it may dominate and all but fill the whole action, like the spirit of war in *Journey's End*, or Tchekhov's cherry orchard

Now consider *Othello* What is Shakespeare to do in so eminently a domestic play? Remember how we saw that actual thunder and tempest was not a suitable accompaniment to Othello's specifically domestic tragedy and observe how Shakespeare consequently edges his tempest in differently, making it for once contrast with rather than accompany the later conflict, by means of the stormy voyage to Cyprus That, however, is over now What can take over is a universalizing symbol? Shakespeare chooses an eminently domestic article<sup>1</sup> and saturates it with supernatural significance which thus becomes automatically a symbol of domestic sanctity It serves to bind and focus the action Othello, Desdemona, Emilia, Iago, Cassio, and Bianca all possess it in turn

The lines must be spoken with terrific but controlled intensity Othello's mind is *above* his passion He enters with eline grace and slippered softness From now on he wears

1 The carpet in *Hassan* might be called 'domestic' too Hassan's personal domesticity is, of course, crucial He is a homely person involved in the horrors of strife We can observe that textile fabrics are naturally apt to oriental plays hence again these dominant symbols, the carpet and the handkerchief, in *Hassan* and *Othello* For my considered interpretation of *Hassan* see *The Wind and the Rain*, Spring, 1944

his long, straight, purple gown, the coloured robe discarded. He holds Desdemona's hand, finding it moist. At 'This is a good hand' he studies it, like a palmist, thus preparing for what follows. Desdemona cannot produce the handkerchief. Othello describes how it was given to his mother by an Egyptian charmer who 'could almost read the thoughts of people', as a security against losing her husband's love. Desdemona is frightened. Othello's words gather intensity.

'Tis true, there's magic in the web of it  
 A sibyl that had numbered in the world  
 The sun to course two hundred compasses,  
 In her prophetic fury sewed the work;  
 The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,  
 And it was dyed in mummy which the skilful  
 Conserved of maidens' hearts.

Such speeches are lost on a modern audience in a furniture-cluttered stage. Throughout until his exit Othello should neither rage, nor appear pathetic. His words are the channel of a terrible and irrevocable fate, and stern control and reserve in their utterance, like a channel's limits, gives them force and direction. Othello becomes here a terrific force. The powers of the handkerchief are being in the same speech described and proved. So Desdemona, perplexed, murmurs 'Sure, there's some wonder in this handkerchief'. She has already seen its powers in operation.<sup>1</sup> Notice how, after Othello's exit, Emilia uses his behaviour to justify her cynical remarks spoken just before his entrance. Shakespeare has done his best to forestall criticism as to her later silence. From now on the handkerchief dominates the action. It is not too much to say that Othello kills Desdemona not for an act of physical unfaithfulness, but for parting with the handkerchief.<sup>2</sup> For that is an act suggesting the desecration of a universal sanctity.

We grouped the next few scenes together with a given

1 I owe this vital reading of Desdemona's remark to Mr Middleton Murry.

2 Pope had the point. See *The Rape of the Lock*, v, ll 105-106.

curtain half-pulled to reveal a black curtain background C, with a single chair in the opening. The chair proved very useful. Othello is discovered beside and slightly in front of it facing down-stage, with Iago kneeling on the chair towards him, instilling verbal poison. The tableau compresses a miniature of the whole play's meaning. You see Othello's mind thinking away on its own, Iago preying on it. Othello's words should be wandringly half-delirious, not passionate and violent. Indeed the usual view of Othello as 'a part to tear a cat in' is quite off the point. His whole expression here should be one of extreme *intellectual* agony. His mind is shown in pieces. Observe how Iago keeps bringing back his attention to the handkerchief, and the reiterated part it plays in his delirium just before he falls. It is Iago's main instrument of torture.

The chair was useful for Othello to sink in after witnessing Cassio's meeting with Bianca and the handkerchief business between them, and later for Desdemona, and Roderigo. But first we get Lodovico's entry. We had a tall actor in the part. At this point, where he strikes Desdemona, it is helpful for Othello to lose some of his former dignity. Lodovico comes in expressly as a challenge to his high position. To inform him of his recall and Cassio's advancement. This entry is dramatically most significant. Fate, it seems, is assisting Iago<sup>1</sup> to torment Othello, whose words to Lodovico 'Cassio shall have my place' and 'You are welcome, Sir, to Cyprus' thus hold a bitterly ironic note. This last speech to Lodovico is on the border of insanity, and the final 'Goats and monkeys' not shouted, but laughed, with a demonic, dry laugh. We cut Othello's next interview with Desdemona, arrang-

<sup>1</sup> This is usual in Shakespeare. Events are as important as psychology. Shakespeare's heroes do not altogether carve out their own course. Fateful circumstance does at least half the work, pressing them to evil (as in *Macbeth*), or to nobility (as in *Antony and Cleopatra*). Here fate is just ironical. After all, 'fate', like each person, is ultimately only an aspect of Shakespeare's dramatic expression. However, in such instances Shakespeare records life faithfully. We all share responsibility with circumstance, and chance blends curiously with mental states.

ing for her to re-enter with Emilia. She sits on the chair and later kneels to Iago. She does not touch him, nor he her. The effect on Iago is left by Shakespeare unregistered. To follow Shakespeare, let Iago turn up-stage after Desdemona's exit, and stand with his back to the audience. Iago must not be shown as positively callous of her pathetic position, nor as deeply moved by it. He speaks courteously enough to her. It is just outside his inhuman attention, I suppose. I do not think the producer should commit himself one way or the other—hence my arrangement.

Roderigo next sits in the chair, ludicrously dignified, at the words 'no more than I intend doing'. Seeing this new self-assertion, Iago plays on his pride and suggests 'removing' Cassio. Roderigo rises and advances nervously towards Iago at 'How do you mean removing of him?' And next he retreats behind and up-stage of the chair, sliding his hand tremblingly along its back, as though to put it between himself and Iago, on 'And that you would have me do?' We tried crossing below it at first, but that did not work at all. The use of this single chair for so many and diverse successive occasions of such varying quality since Othello and Iago were first discovered there helped to bind and knit the play at a point where its action is, comparatively, limp. For there is, intentionally, less grandeur of action here—you just watch Othello slipping. His dignity is temporarily gone.

It returns, however, in the last scene. No protagonist of Shakespearian tragedy attains a richer dignity at his end: it is almost formalistic, statuesque. This quality must be preserved. We had Desdemona's bed central between dark curtains, above the steps. I was offered a real old-style bed, but it looked uncomfortable and self-conscious up there, and we did better with a built-up arrangement of simple blocks, laying a rich purple covering over the sheets. The result held suggestion of both bed and altar. You want some such formality. The candle tones with it, while the more universal moon and star references contrast and blend with the candle. Throughout the scene those gems of poetry referring,

to stars, the moon, the world 'of one entire and perfect chrysolite' should be given with measured and underlined emphasis Othello can catch the same beam from the wings for the stars and moon though this is not really necessary Observe the reiterated references to the handkerchief, both before and after Desdemona's death Just as the handkerchief caused the final overthrow of Othello's love, so not until Cassio's explanation does Othello recognize the full depth of his folly Notice that this explanation is withheld till the last possible moment Then it is decisive Thought of the handkerchief dominates the whole situation in this scene this can and should be got across

An interesting point arose at Othello's attack on Iago If that synchronizes with Montano's trying to stop Othello, and Iago's stabbing Emilia, while Gratiano is drawing near ready to hold her afterwards, you get the whole stage scrambling round Emilia like a football scrum So we had Emilia down LC, Iago down L, and Gratiano close by Othello is up-stage on the steps at their right end He stands there, towering, for 'Are there no stones', and at 'Precious villain!' charges directly down-stage so that he faces across the stage's width with his weapon drawn, Montano outside him, R, catching his uplifted arm Coming directly down-stage often gives a more powerful effect of approaching a person on the other side than going diagonally towards him Besides, the instant's tableau across the stage was effective Notice, by the way, Shakespeare's usual trick of howing his people greater than you or they had guessed in his use here of Emilia I used an innovation concerning Othello's swords His two attacks on Iago I reduced to one The 'sword of Spain' he is so keen on can then be the word he is going to kill himself with He puts it on the bed till he needs it This lends point to his words, and avoids other difficulties I cannot help thinking my arrangement somehow follows Shakespeare's intention though the text, against it Othello dies up against the bed, Emilia the other side The grouping is important



In acting the part of Othello I felt convinced that there is nothing in him particularly primitive or of negroid savagery. He is not to be confused with O'Neill's magnificent study in *The Emperor Jones*. Othello's pain is largely an intellectual pain at the ruin of a romantic faith. There are certainly moments of barbaric fury, and there are others of neurotic disgust, and some of delirium, but nothing of a sub-human and jungle violence. And at the last he attains a serenity, killing Desdemona almost as a sacred duty. The Renaissance poet here idealizes human love in the Provençal romantic tradition of modern literature. Othello, Desdemona, and Iago are Man, the Divine, and the Devil. That a Moor should be the protagonist in a play of this type is not strange. I have read that the romance-cult came to the Provençal troubadours and thence to Petrarch and Dante through the Moorish civilization in Spain. Shakespeare has a habit of getting such significant touches right: observe how Richard III appropriately swears always by St. Paul, who according to one tradition was deformed. Iago is in the poetry explicitly associated with the Devil, but only in somewhat the same sense that Bosola is implicitly a sort of devil—that is, in a typically Renaissance and humanist play, where the divine is approached through the human, the Devil logically must be human too.<sup>1</sup> This may help to explain the almost absurdly villainous persons in Elizabethan drama. The universal essences of the morality plays occur in human form.

The producer must have some sense of these more universal suggestions. The symbolic effects I have emphasized in my arrangement are all in the poetry. Iago knows he is in league with hell-forces and often says so, while Desdemona is clearly equated imaginatively with divinity. But the moment any of this is allowed to interfere with the expressly domestic and human qualities of the drama, you get disaster. You neglect either aspect at your peril: you must get

1 *Macbeth* provides an interesting contrast.

both, and thus build a solid. There can be alternations in emphasis, but never any mutual exclusion. The outline given here shows, I hope, an attitude true equally to both for in our feeling for the whole there should be no distinction.

(e) *Hamlet*

*Rudolf Sterner Hall, London (1935)*

Production here should stress (i) the death atmosphere of the play, (ii) the balanced contrast and opposition of the King and Hamlet, not shirking the good or evil in either, (iii) Hamlet's change of appearance, and (iv) sound-effects. Much of the play is indecisive and enigmatic: this quality must be preserved. You get death-forces paradoxically allied with moral good, and life-forces with evil. The dominant sound-effects touch neither music nor tempest, but are set between a particular sequence peculiar to this play of drums, trumpets, and cannon. It is as though Shakespeare's own axes of reference in the imaginative world are here themselves suspect. The Ghost, the sound-effects, the King, Hamlet himself, the final duel, indeed the whole play, are strangely both clear and precise in one sense but extremely baffling in another.

We used curtains with no sky-sheet but a repeated set of dais, thrones, chair, inset central platform, and steps. Often we had a semi-front-scene made by drawing a curtain half-way on one side, yet spacing the action up to the curtain behind on the other which both enabled us to keep the throne-dais on the stage throughout and also suggested the play's see-saw enigmatic quality, close-twined more than once with 'policy' and deceit, clarity and uncertainty mixed. Such an expedient would not suit every play. Such was our set for the first Ghost scene. I now give a series of notes under my own act headings.

ACT I

We start with the traditional twelve beats, lights down. The curtain discovers Francisco on guard in the deep half

of the stage R. There is a sound of whining wind not too loud <sup>1</sup> this is repeated during the early part of the scene at appropriate intervals. There is a bench L. The lights are a little dimmed, toning to a suggestion of blues and greens on the deep area R where the Ghost will appear. Marcellus, Horatio, and Bernardo, who have all entered L (no one but the Ghost enters or exits R), are L, Bernardo sitting on the bench, at 'Peace, break thee off'. The Ghost enters C from behind the curtain entering from the same side of the stage, only farther up, as persons already on it, is often effective when one party is to be for a second or so unaware of the other. The Ghost comes down R, facing across at the others. Horatio, between Marcellus and Bernardo, addresses it without moving, to contrast with his action at its next entrance. This contrast suits his words and is most important. The Ghost goes out down R. On its re-entrance down R, Horatio, now bolder, crosses C past Marcellus and addresses it. As it turns up-stage, Horatio crosses it R, swinging round with his back to the audience and calling to Marcellus to stop it. Marcellus attacks it, moving diagonally up-stage across the curtain edge C, while the Ghost easily goes off C behind the curtain. Their words "'Tis here', "'Tis here', "'Tis gone', are variously spoken about the stage, helping to disembody the Ghost. The Ghost should give no appearance of hurry: a deliberate and dignified turn and pause before finally disappearing helps the impression of its invulnerability. You should see Marcellus miss it, and also clearly see it go off. The rest of this scene is easy. The dawn lines are spoken down L. Horatio and Marcellus go out L, leaving Bernardo on guard.

Curtains are drawn and the seat removed while an elab-

<sup>1</sup> Wind is a natural ghost effect. Compare the wind ghost association in Claudio's death speech, Tennyson's lines on Gawain in *The Passing of Arthur*, and at the end of *Hassan*. Compare the impression of 'cold' in *Hassan* with reference to ghosts with Hamlet's remark "The air bites shrewdly: it is bitter cold." There is a certain communal store of imaginative impressions, with a logic of their own, throughout literature, that has not yet been studied.

orate flourish sounds, and immediately after the full Court-set is disclosed carpeted steps and platform C, two thrones on a dais L, Hamlet's chair R. The King and Queen are C descending the steps, everyone, including Hamlet, who stands by his chair, bowing. Hamlet wears a rich dress of black and white. In this production the King spoke his lines about drinking and cannons down C, and went off with most of the others L but I think now this should have been spoken up-stage on the steps with a corresponding exit. The lines are so very important. At the general exit Hamlet bows again it is essential throughout the play to show that the King is King if he is taller than Hamlet and generally made to seem more dominating in appearance, the play is assisted. Every Shakespearian king has to be understood on two levels (i) as a man and (ii) as a king. Generally the interweaving and contrasted implications of these two views are vital to the plot, as here.

Hamlet helps to solidify the thrones by indicating them during his soliloquy at appropriate phrases, visualizing the King and Queen. On their entry he draws Horatio and the two officers down-stage, while the curtain is pulled behind them. His hearing of their news is best concentrated as a front-scene. Observe Horatio's delicate aspersions on the courage of the other two here and both before and after this occasion (in the first and second Ghost scene) there is a running series of more or less good-natured hostility, sarcasm and continual contradiction between the scholar and soldiers. Observe the irony by which soldiers had to call in a scholar to deal with a supernatural fear. We tried to give a touch of this running hostility, but I doubt if it got over it was too dangerous and difficult to stress heavily. After Hamlet's exit the action continues with Laertes and Ophelia. In this scene Ophelia can show a sense of humour with Laertes and a note of sullenness at 'I shall obey' to Polonius we don't want her too much of a weakling.

The curtain is now half-drawn and lights change for the

Ghost scene, this time without the bench L The wind is heard again The flourish and cannon off are done on a distant wailing elfin note Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus all show a momentary start, their nerves on edge 'What does this mean, my lord?' Then Hamlet laughs bitterly and explains This flourish and cannon come shortly before the Ghost's entrance, which follows the sooner through our cutting Hamlet's long speech, and also throws forward to similar effects in the last scene Its peculiar significance is enhanced by delicately relating it to the Ghost from the start Also, like the whining wind, the bugle and cannon strike a balance somewhere between music and tempest which suits exactly the enigmatic nature of the Ghost The Ghost enters this time down R Hamlet crosses C, leaving Horatio and Marcellus L, and addresses it His speech is subtly varied You start with awe, amaze, love (in the word 'father') then a pause, awaiting an answer 'O answer me!' Now agony, pathos ('quietly injured'), and another pause after 'cerements' Now almost hysteria, a mind distraught, violent The Ghost beckons Hamlet half turns back, indecisive, at 'It will not speak *then will I follow it*', is more determined at 'It waves me forth again, *I'll follow it*', and is violently so at 'It waves me still Go on, *I'll follow thee*' Notice the contrasts He now breaks from Horatio and Marcellus at 'Unhand me, gentlemen', throwing them back far L and springing R himself, drawing his sword Next, 'By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!' The Ghost has been moving up while making his successive gestures, and is now RC, Hamlet down R Hamlet has broken from the world of his companions to join that of the Ghost his struggle with Horatio and Marcellus is most important and must be clearly seen, and his breaking from them R must make a new significant picture Hamlet now goes up R far into the Ghost area, and says, 'Go on, I'll follow *thee*', the new emphasis on 'thee' marking Hamlet's sense of allegiance to the Ghost Both exit L up C behind the curtain

The drawing of the half curtain reveals the throne dais as a plain platform against the curtains L. There is wind again, or surf, louder than before. The lights show a predominance of blue, but the whole stage is clearly visible. The Ghost LC near the platform – sometimes resting one foot on it – addresses Hamlet C. Hamlet sinks with a moan as his mother's sin is described. Saying farewell the Ghost comes down holding out his arms, and Hamlet totters towards the embrace of death. The Ghost ascends the platform and disappears through the curtains, leaving Hamlet with his head in his hands. Left alone Hamlet addresses the stars, earth, and hell. He reiterates the command to 'remember', looking L and building the platform into a Ghost symbol. Whilst declaring his renunciation of past trivialities he tears off his rich cloak and leaves it, almost as an offering, on the platform. If it has metal or glass sequins it should glisten there tellingly. 'So, Uncle, there *you* are' is spoken carelessly with an emphatic 'you', but, 'Now to my word – it is adieu, adieu, remember me' is done solemnly, looking L. The contrast is significant. Horatio and Marcellus enter R. Hamlet twice on appropriate words wards them off from the platform as they eagerly question him, thus further impregnating it with Ghost significance. At the first subterranean 'Swear' he takes them from RC down C, and at the second, from there up L to the platform. The Ghost is breaking down Hamlet's reluctance to initiate them. I have no clearer idea in mind, but this is the only arrangement as far as I know that has ever given any point to these strange, enigmatic, but important movements. Hamlet stands with one foot on the Ghost platform, high priest of the occasion, the others kneel before it and swear on his sword hilt. He looks L at 'Rest, rest, perturbed spirit'. The rest is easy: they go out R, Hamlet breaking away on his 'The time is out of joint', and falling back weakly into their arms just before the exit. In this scene I would point to the use made of the platform and the cloak: an object thus loaded with meaning can be most powerful. The cloak is left there to the

end, the wind rises over an otherwise empty stage, and the curtain closes

A roll of drums concludes Act I

## ACT II

The act starts with a roll of drums Polonius is discovered L in front of a plain curtain, Ophelia entering through it C, looking over her shoulder and showing fear Her description of Hamlet's terrifying appearance must be given intense narrative concentration She is to act her words, as the text, indeed, implies

Next the Court-set is disclosed with a table by Hamlet's chair R The King and Queen speak with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and after, with Polonius Polonius is then alone Hamlet enters L and walks slowly across to his corner R and sits in his chair

His dress is now a plain black tunic - earlier he wore black and white - unlaced, the traditional open white shirt, disarranged hair, a soiled white rag tied in his belt, hanging limply, and his right arm through a black torn and tattered cloak not fixed to the other shoulder so that it drags far behind In preparing my Toronto production I found no disorder of a normal costume of any use it either looked neat from the front or as though I had dressed carelessly It must be done - like everything else that is important - by some positive and significant addition That is how I came to use the white rag and fantastic tattered cloak in London I couldn't get such a good cloak, but the principle was the same The use of a cloak half on and half trailing behind blends with our occasional use of a half-drawn curtain, it particularly suggests Hamlet's border-line state Hamlet can pick up the loose train and throw it over his left arm to look tidy, curled round his feet it makes him a king of grief, holding his arms out, tatters falling, he looks fantastic, alone, he can sometimes remove it altogether His appearance now must anyway contrast strongly with that in Act I he must seem disintegrated

gone-to-pieces, the glamour and light of life have left him

He talks to Polonius sarcastically from his corner R and then greets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern happily, walking C, and perhaps arranging his cloak sanely, throwing the loose end over his arm. They say 'the world has become honest'. He laughs merrily for his 'then is doomsday come', then reality weighs back on him suddenly. 'But your news is not true' is spoken bitterly. Thenafter he is suspicious and bitter, his cloak trails, he moves about near his chair. We find a similar rhythm in his first meeting with Horatio: first, spontaneous pleasure, then - 'I prithee do not mock me'. Everything is sooner or later related to his own obsession. It happens again with the Players, and with Ophelia. At the Players' entry he is happy and thoroughly excited at the prospect of a 'passionate speech'. But the words 'móbléd queen' he repeats, referring them to his mother, and again the light is extinguished. The Players go, he gets rid of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. 'Ay so, God be with you' is spoken with irritation. He puts the MS. of the play on the table and throws off his cloak. 'Now I am alone'. This soliloquy demands exact attention.

Hamlet's chair is R and from that corner his more bitter speeches have been delivered. The two thrones are L: they suggest the world ranged against him. His more subjective fears come from his own side, R. He starts the soliloquy standing near his chair. At 'What's Hecuba to him' his irritation is marked by a determined advance down C. Soon this fails in disgust, and he retreats R, falling hopelessly in his chair at 'Yet I, a dull and muddy-mettled rascal'. At 'Who calls me villain?' still sitting, he looks R as at an unseen enemy of his own imagination. Then he rises with new virulence and marches LC facing the thrones for 'this slave's offal'. Next a left turn up-stage to the steps C marks a failure, which is followed immediately with a recovery, another left turn, so that he speaks the words 'bloody bawdy villain' over his left shoulder, again looking at the thrones: this gives an impression of scorn that can be



helped by not greatly stressing these three words. Careless disgust is wanted. Hamlet's failure is not cowardice so much as mental inability to find a working basis for even a hostile relation to his surroundings. His speech gathers power at 'Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain'. The rhyme can be given a touch of mad humour. He sways, drawing a dagger, then leaps down-stage at 'Vengeance', attacking the King's throne (the up-stage one of the two). His attack is cut short, dagger in mid-air, by his critical judgment that now throws him into more disgust, as he sinks on the dais beneath the throne, defeated again by circumstance. The dagger held in mid-air seems a more controlled and precise effect than a series of hysterical stabs at the throne. He rises at 'About, my brain', goes to the table R, picks up the MS, throws his cloak over his shoulder and walks down L while the curtain is half-drawn behind his new position, leaving the chair and table R still visible. This pulling of the curtain whilst Hamlet walks round it gives an impression of stealthy movement from one room to another, along corridors, which suits his plotting lines.

If you trace out these movements on a diagram you will find how they aim to express futility and inaction in terms of stage action, zig-zags being the obvious solution. The half-drawing of the curtain suggests a new line of action, but an indirect one, away from the thrones which is apt. It also leaves our set ready for the 'nunneiy' scene.

Ophelia is left sitting in the chair R with the spies behind the half-drawn curtain. The lights are dimmed a little for this scene of mental twilight. Hamlet enters L. It is a mistake to let Ophelia go off during the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. She, a creature of beauty and young life, is in Hamlet's mind to be contrasted with his own death-obsession. You therefore want them both as a visible contrast during the lines. There might be more light on her than on him. When Hamlet advances, he can kneel first, but rise and retreat at 'I never gave you aught'. He speaks these early speeches gently, with an occasional touch of bitterness.

and perhaps of fun, too, as he catalogues his faults he could be almost playful, and she might smile, and you feel he may succumb after all to her old appeal. A touch of flirtation helps. He dallies with her hand or hair. Eventually he turns at 'Go thy ways to a nunnery', speaking lovingly. Now there is just a faint sound of the Ghost-wind. It raises in Hamlet the demon of mistrust. You see it in his eyes. 'Where's your father?' She shows guilt and lies. He steps back in horror against the curtain and registers that he has felt the presence of spies. His final speeches are done on the borderland of insanity, but not with shouting. 'It hath made me mad' should come in a tense, agonized whisper. Controlled insanity is the line to take and a very difficult one.

The full-set for the play scene. Hamlet and Horatio are discovered on the steps C, and then come down. At the King's entry, done formally from C and down the steps to elaborate flourishes, Hamlet gets in front of the thrones, blocking his way. The King pauses. Hamlet laughs devilishly. 'How does my cousin Hamlet?' Hamlet's answer is as fantastically and luridly given as possible. This picture captures and compresses the essence of our middle action. You don't get enough of such significant tableaux as a rule. The tall and thriving King at the head of his train in full ceremony finds himself faced by the less imposing figure of Hamlet that mocks his painted glory. Contrasted with Hamlet's forced humility when they last met in Act I, it shows how the pretence (or partial truth) of madness gives Hamlet a freedom impossible before. You seldom get this change properly underlined. During the play, done up C on the platform, Hamlet sits on the ground by Ophelia R watching the King, who steadies himself with a drink. 'Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in it?' is best spoken to Polonius, L. Hamlet immediately rises, and goes C, telling the King 'they do but jest, murder in jest - no offence in the world', with ironical reference to the King's easy conscience. Hamlet goes up-stage, one foot on the steps RC indicating Lucianus, and drawing his sword at 'The croaking

raven doth bellow for revenge' This can be ranted. On the decisive words 'He poisons him in the garden' he walks diagonally down L to the King, speaking not too loud and carelessly fingering his sword with both hands. I sometimes held the point poised towards the King. I do not know how it looked from the front. When the King rises the words of Ophelia, Hamlet, and Polonius must all be heard, while the King holds for a second his rigid position, standing. This is a powerful and precise effect, better than a general hurly-burly. The King dashes out. Hamlet, alone with Horatio, is triumphant. His calling for music reflects a psychological release and a new sense of freedom in action. He is king of the situation. His words with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are done sharply, they come like the crack of a whip, especially the 'recorder' pieces. Horatio is the last to leave Hamlet. He goes up to him as though realizing the crucial nature of this moment in his story. Hamlet clasps his hand and puts him aside. What follows he must do alone. Soliloquizing, his thoughts are first violent with revenge-images of blood, then, his eye catching the thrones, he recalls his coming interview with his mother, the two thoughts coalesce and he prays that he may not confuse the issue and use 'daggers' on her. During this speech the lights - which have been varied appropriately before, during, and after the play - are toned with red.

The King's prayer follows in a front-scene. The King should really get the audience's sympathy here. Hamlet enters C, speaks his lines without any white-washing of their horror, and then recalls his mother. Observe how she seems more important to him than the King. All this must be going very quickly.

Now to the Queen's closet. There is a chair and a table L and a couch R. Polonius hides C. The Queen arranges herself with dignity in the chair L and Hamlet enters R. Their first words go swift. The Queen rises. Hamlet draws his sword. She cries for help, thinking he means to murder her. Hamlet kills Polonius. The Queen screams and crosses far

down R Hamlet draws the curtain and the body falls it should be visible during the scene Hamlet, L, lays his cloak, which was thrown over his shoulder, on the table, and his sword beside it Pointing to the couch R he tells the Queen to sit down She approaches from her far position, mesmerized by his determination At the word-picture of his father he comes close, sitting or kneeling on the couch both pictures are best purely mental, I think As the speech grows in violence Hamlet draws away C At 'O shame, where is thy blush?' he turns down L, speaking rhetorically What started as a righteous lecture has become introverted rhetoric It grows worse 'Nay, but to live ' is spoken right away from the Queen Hamlet is overcome by his own nausea He grows pathological He is close to the table fingering the sword Nausea turns to insane hysterics 'A murderer and a villain ' It comes in spasms, jerks The King stole the crown from a shelf and 'put it in his pocket' Maniac laughter He now has the sword At 'a king of shreds and patches' he charges across the stage R at the Queen, whose head in her hands sobbing is turned from him In mid-volley, about to stab, he stops, drops the sword, slowly turns left facing the audience and with utterly changed voice says the words 'Save me and hover o'er me with your wings ' He turns farther, is being drawn left by the Ghost, who has entered behind him, L Notice that Hamlet is aware of the Ghost before seeing him physically, and how his prayer is used to refer partly at least to his attack on his mother This is a good example of a way by which supernatural can, without any play on lights, be presented in direct and positive dramatic action Polonius's body should be up-stage LC Then the Ghost's entrance L can be related to it the first shedding of blood since the Ghost's command brings the death-figure again on the stage Having turned completely to the Ghost, Hamlet with bended head addresses him again The Queen comes up to him, and both face L

At the Ghost's exit L and Hamlet's words, 'My father in

his habit as he lived" the Queen shows anger and sits in the chair L, remarking on Hamlet's madness. Her defence is raised: she is definitely a woman who hides unpleasant things from herself and is angry if forced to face them, and Hamlet's reference to his father troubles her. Observe that this chair L, which she used at the start, is her position of self-assertion, the couch, of humility. Hamlet tells her to 'confess herself to Heaven' and leads her R as though to go off. Passing up-stage of the couch, however, she sinks on it, sobbing. Hamlet stands C, baffled and distressed, and asks that his virtue be forgiven. Repeated 'good-nights' reflect his indecision. Turning to Polonius he expresses repentance. The weeping Queen one side, Polonius dead the other, he looks at them in turn. He sinks by the Queen, his head on her knees. 'I must be cruel only to be kind.' Next, fearful of this weakness, he draws back from her and utters voluble sarcasm. His phrase 'mad in craft' should be so spoken that you doubt it. The strain is telling on him. As he refers to his going to England, and talks of outwitting his enemies, his eye glints with insane cunning: it is best done close up to the Queen. Hamlet's expression suddenly changes for 'This man shall set me packing'. Solemnly he regards Polonius and comments on the body. He kneels by it, says 'good-night' for the last time and the curtains close.

Next follows a short front-scene. The King sends for Hamlet, who is brought in between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as a prisoner. At this moment you should certainly feel that the King is a force of order,<sup>1</sup> Hamlet a danger. Continually you need to get some such contrast: the King a finely material, Hamlet a darkly spiritual, force. So the fine-robed King now faces Hamlet, who with something of an hideous and unabashed assurance reminds him how a painted outside can veil an inward corruption, and all kings are merely meat fatted for death-worms. Hamlet's words are spoken with somewhat of a Feste's jest-accent,

<sup>1</sup> See III, iii, 7-23. I might well have quoted this passage to support my view of the King in former essays.

which deepens their horror. Arrested, guards either side, guilty of murder, Hamlet bears a charmed life and knows it – so does the King. All now hinges on England. ‘To England!’ Hamlet speaks the words with a devilish smile. The significance of this England voyage is somewhat enigmatic. Hamlet’s expression must help make it so.

The act ends with the King’s speech, ‘Do it, England’, and a roll of drums.

### ACT III

We precluded the third movement with a few muted trumpet notes to tone with Ophelia’s mad scene. The Hamlet-Fortinbras incident had to go. For the mad scene looped curtains would do well. We had no time to arrange this, and used a plain background. I have in *The Imperial Theme* shown how, after Hamlet has been revealed as a dangerous force, opposing values of life-excellence are sublimated. We get Fortinbras’ soldiership, Ophelia’s pathetic madness (due to Hamlet’s act), the King’s admirable courage and regal dignity, Laertes’ manly determination. To dress Ophelia in black seems to me therefore wrong. Hers is a pretty, flowery, and colourful insanity. The King’s remarks during Ophelia’s madness should appear sympathetic, springing from a kind heart. The Laertes riot should be big waves of shouting. Finally the King leads Laertes off and reappears with him immediately for a front-scene. The plot should show the King in a new light. Hitherto only the very subtlest suggestions of an essentially villainous nature – if that – should have been apparent. A spectator viewing the play for the first time should theoretically never be quite sure, in spite of the Play scene and the King’s two soliloquies, whether Hamlet’s view has full justification. But now you get the plot thickening. The Queen’s lovely description of Ophelia’s death is best done like this before a plain curtain. But a gentlewoman, perhaps two, should enter with her. To bring in Ophelia’s body on a bier borne by four hooded figures appears to me gratuitously weak. So often attempts at en-

riching Shakespeare with significant action and ill-chosen

For various reasons we cut the Second Gravedigger. This is an unusual but perfectly satisfactory cut. The scene opens with our half-drawn curtain, the Gravedigger singing in the grave up R, Hamlet and Horatio entering down L. The lights are suggestive of evening, with sunset red. Hamlet is now more assured, dignified, and controlled. His journey to England may be taken to mark a spiritual or psychological advance.<sup>1</sup> He voyages through to a new serenity. This was suggested by his wearing new and colourful clothes—red-dish-purple, with a cloak of the same colour, a colour suggesting tragic dignity and spiritual authority, and also toning well with the graveyard scene. He also has a small greyish beard and white streaks line his hair, marking an increase of age that assists this quality of spiritual advance and also has some justification in the text.<sup>2</sup> 'How long hast thou been a grave-maker' should be curiously spoken with a dwelling emphasis on 'grave'. Hamlet is so interested in graves, skulls, death, and all that concerns them. For the speech on Yorick's skull he is L of the grave, but R of Horatio—the centre of a small group. At Toronto we had a platform (covered with canvas) leading up to the grave. First Hamlet addressed the Gravedigger with one foot on this level, but later advanced to take Yorick's skull, high and central, Horatio moving to Hamlet's first position. This makes a formal group for what is an apex of imaginative intensity. The Yorick lines should be taken slow,<sup>3</sup> the whole scene up to this should go smoothly, and its emotional quality be allowed to luxuriate at leisure. The stillness of eternity should brood over it.

This stillness is next violently disturbed. The funeral pro-

1 Compare Stavrogin's voyage into the far North in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* as interpreted by Mr Middleton Murry.

2 Compare the sense we receive of Romeo's advance to manhood and Macbeth's to old age.

3 On the phrase 'your songs' the actor should think of Feste and dwell on the word 'songs'. Yorick is a symbol of all those lost dreams.

cession enters, with a tolling bell After the struggle with Laertes Hamlet is between Laertes (C) and the grave (R) The King (LC) restrains Laertes Hamlet's ranting speech is spoken with controlled fury and cynical abandon, a bitter self-critical rhetoric 'I'll rant as well as thou' means to suggest that Hamlet's strangeness derives from his possession of more, not less, feeling than others Laertes is, in comparison, a child in emotional experience Hamlet's love was 'forty thousand' times his You might well have Laertes in mourning here, getting a happy contrast with Hamlet's now brighter clothes as though Laertes has crossed the threshold into the state Hamlet has come through Hamlet's speeches here are exactly on a par with Stanhope's 'Do you think I don't care?' in *Journey's End* Hamlet is a giant in spiritual stature

Let Hercules himself say what he may,  
The cat will mew, and dog will have his day

Cat' is spoken to Laertes, his grief a mewling only, 'dog' as Hamlet passes opposite and pauses in front of the King (his reference is not, I think, usually brought out in production The King's phrase 'living monument' refers to Hamlet's projected death, and must be spoken with meaning

Hamlet and Horatio re-enter for a front-scene Hamlet's lovely 'Providence' speech ending with 'the readiness is all' witnesses his new acceptance and serenity<sup>1</sup> After Osric's exit the King enters L with Laertes Hamlet, now polite, bows to the King, takes Laertes' hand, speaks courteously The play is highly formal and ceremonial here, and during

1 Note that as soon as Hamlet touches acceptance the act of revenge comes easily, partly by circumstance, partly through his own recapitulated purpose Not that Hamlet reaches the deepest acceptance Had he done that, he could have borne the whole brunt of the evil and the horror of the Ghost's message See variously 'Hamlet Reconsidered', *The Wheel of Fire* (new edition, Methuen, 1949) and *The Time is Out of Joint*, Roy Walker (Dakers, 1948)



the fight Hamlet calls for the foils. The curtains are pulled revealing the Court-set, without Hamlet's chair.

The King and Queen take their places. The King describes the drums, flourish, and cannon that shall sound when he drinks to celebrate Hamlet's success.<sup>1</sup> This throw-back to his similar speech in Act I – notice how the correspondence is the finer for our using the same set – where these sounds were to accompany the King's celebration of Hamlet's willingness to stay in Denmark. Hamlet is involved in both. In both instances, too, the actual sounds when they actually occur, act rather as a warning to Hamlet: first, in the sense I have already described, making Hamlet and Horatio start nervously on the platform before the Ghost's entry, and now in one I shall shortly indicate Hamlet and Laertes salute the King – the salute marking Hamlet's new and formal respect. The courtiers, all but Osric, are grouped up R. Laertes and Osric are L, Hamlet and Horatio down R, the King and Queen on the thrones and one Gentleman (looking after the cups) up L. At Hamlet's first hit the King drinks and sends the Gentleman across to Hamlet with the cup. Meanwhile the drums, followed by the trumpet, are sounding. Just as Hamlet is about to take the cup, the cannon goes off ominously. His mind changes. 'I'll play this bout first, set it by awhile.' This is the warning referred to just now. I have no explicit interpretation but this is the sort of enigmatic but precise effect that characterizes *Hamlet* throughout – and it comes straight from the text – I was not aware of it till it happened in performance. Now Hamlet scores another hit. The Queen comes across to him with her napkin and then takes the cup from the Gentleman, who has stood RC since Hamlet told him to 'set it by'. This gets the Queen well away from the King, who can be talking to Laertes, when she starts to drink. Notice Hamlet's polite 'good madam' – his whole be-

<sup>1</sup> The last big production I saw let the cannon off during this speech, as well as later. Great care had been taken over many essentials of sets and lights, but the things that matter are so often slurred or muddled.

haviour now suits his new clothes The King, too late to prevent the Queen drinking, goes up C in great anxiety Hamlet, hurt, registers to Horatio, then gets Laertes' weapon, drives him down L, and wounds him The Queen falls

The whole duel is very important, and should be as striking and powerful as possible It holds the see-saw indecisive *Hamlet*-quality, enigmatic yet precise It balances the whole play a hair's weight will turn the scales Laertes is poised against Hamlet, healthy normality against neurotic genius It must be breathlessly exciting, assisted by attentive watchers Hamlet once attacks Laertes and runs past him so that they have changed positions Then he works back The more variety the better, using the whole stage This fight most subtly reflects the whole play As Hamlet becomes almost evil, is anyway a channel for evil, so that the King's crime may be rammed back on him,<sup>1</sup> so Hamlet, wounded by Laertes' treachery, gets the poisoned rapier to return the blow Whatever the opposing forces do to Hamlet comes back on them<sup>2</sup> On the voyage to England he changes the commands and hoists his adversaries with their own petard The King sends him away, but the seas cast him back It is a curiously reiterated rhythm the fight sums it up in sharp, significant action

The King in terror has gone up C on to the steps Hamlet gets RC ordering the doors, imagined up L, to be locked The crowd R prevents the King escaping there He is hemmed in As Hamlet rushes to kill him he descends, bravely meeting his end, perhaps trying the king-divinity stunt again Horatio comes between the crowd and the steps, holding up one hand as though warding them off

1 Compare Macbeth's

This even-handed justice  
Commends the ingredients of our *poison'd chalice*  
To our own *lips*

Which *actually* happens to Claudius

2 Compare Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p 172

from what is a necessary act. This at first sounds weak, but is nevertheless dramatically most powerful and deeply significant. It provides a reason for the crowd's failure to stop Hamlet, it is in exact tune with the part played by Horatio, and it, together with the altar like platform and steps, lends the deed a certain almost ritualistic suggestion which tones with the formality of the last scene and Shakespearian tragedy in general. The position need not, of course, be held long. Osric moves C, then R. Laertes lies dying down L, the Queen lies at the foot of her throne against the dais L. The King totters down the steps as Hamlet puts the cup to his mouth – again almost a ritualistic and ceremonious touch – and then falls, lying up against the left end of the steps. Hamlet and Horatio struggle for the cup C, then Hamlet, supported by Horatio, ascends the throne. All the dead or dying are now grouped in a diagonal line from C to down L, variation being preserved by their positions. Laertes flat, the Queen against the low dais, the King up on to the central steps, Hamlet sitting on the throne. Observe that Hamlet has three times walked down from up C to the King's throne – once when attacking it during his soliloquy, once while terrorizing the King during the play, and now. This is the advantage of a permanent set for recurring big scenes: you can always play on such cross-sections of meaning, which can have a valuable, if only subconscious, effect. Horatio kneels by Hamlet LC. Distant drums beat a steady march. Hamlet enquires their meaning, and hears it is Fortinbras come victorious from Poland. In prophesying and blessing Fortinbras' accession Hamlet sits up, his eye alight with fervour. All his dying speeches are taken happily, on the brink of 'felicity'. He falls back dead. Horatio speaks. The march comes up again, this time near, rapidly nearing, very close, insistent, victorious. 'Why does the drum come hither?' Here the addition of some noises off, the grounding of arms and military commands ('Stand!' – 'Pass the word along!' – 'Stand!') helps to project Fortinbras like a winged arrow on to the stage. He should be

young, fair, and have a rich voice, and wear a Viking helmet, Mercurially winged, and fine armour. He enters R, the crowd makes way for him, and he stands in front of them facing the line of dead.

The group here is most important. It is often complained that the end of Hamlet is absurd, the stage so cluttered with dead. But death is throughout our dominant theme. Hear Fortinbras' words

O proud death,  
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,  
That thou so many princes at a blow  
So bloodily hast struck?

The dead are in a single group L. You must, as so often in Shakespeare, make a special point of the very thing you feared. There is another advantage. Where should Hamlet die? Is not the throne, giving him a formalized and victorious dignity, his rather indecisive course has scarcely warranted, inappropriate? But if he lies on the ground Fortinbras' final honouring of him to the exclusion of the King is visually and dramatically absurd. Our group solves all difficulties. Hamlet is now King, but king only among the dead. He rises over the group of corpses. The place next in honour is held by the King himself, central, on the steps. This preserves a correct balance, and prevents Hamlet's new ascendancy being too dominant. To the last we must preserve our see-saw indecisiveness. But Fortinbras does not *face* the King, and Horatio's fairly central position tends further to lead the eye to Hamlet.

Horatio has risen to meet Fortinbras, in his own person linking the two worlds, of death and life. Remember how he, the scholar, was called in by soldiers to deal with the Ghost at the start. Now Horatio on the steps offers a general explanation, and then returns among the dead, kneeling by Hamlet's chair, praying. Fortinbras speaks his final speech. At 'Go, bid the soldiers shoot!' he draws his sword and holds it steadily at the salute. Horatio is still kneeling. The drums start, a long roll, the trumpets swell out in an elaborate call,

a sort of last post, sinking and rising, trumpet and rolling drums together, a vast roll of sound, waves rolling on and up. Then one cannon, a pause, in silence, then a second. The curtain is drawn, the group still, Fortinbras at the salute, sharing now with Hamlet and the King the honours of the stage, Fortinbras, strong-armed, with the material strength of Claudius and the spiritual strength of Hamlet, a white light on him, the new hope for Denmark.

There is no need to call the bodies off. My arrangement preserves the spirit of Shakespeare's conclusion. The two final cannon sum up the dualistic nature of the play, and, with the other similar effect in this scene, throw back to the flourish and cannon before the Ghost's first entry to Hamlet, thus giving an inevitability and implied necessity to the conclusion, a kind of 'consummatum est', helped also by our use of a permanent set.

(f) *King Lear*

*Hart House Theatre, Toronto (1935)*

I describe shortly my arrangement of the middle action. After their repeated unkindness Lear confronts his daughters as a pathetic figure. He seems to be breaking under their flint-hearted behaviour. Here, especially, realistic touches are called for in the acting of Lear, in voice and gesture. The play is throughout unique in its blend of homely realism with cosmic grandeur. He is an old man in distress. He prays that the heavens may save him from the shame of tears, asking for 'noble anger'. The prayer is answered. He will not weep. He now grows swiftly in stature. This is the turning-point in his story. Ascending the central steps his poise and gestures assume a grand manner he has not touched before as he flings defiance at his daughters. 'O fool - I shall go mad'. He preserves his manhood, but at a terrific cost. Low thunder (there is authority of stage-direction for it) accompanies this, the end of our first act. We are prepared for our middle movement.

In our first act-division we used two white blocks a little

over a man's height. In the first scene they were together, central, suggesting order and government. We used them for the stocks scene as pillars on either side to suggest, vaguely, a courtyard. For our middle action something more is needed. The scene is, superficially, a wild heath, and, psychologically, a sort of eruption. The poetry shows subterranean forces in volcano with leaping flickers of lunacy, devil-dancing about titanic and heroic passion. Something of vast and awful psychic significance is upthrust. The inward world is now our stage and we are to explore fantastic territories. I have a book which warns the actor that *King Lear* shows the breaking of a strong man and leaves it at that. But he is only broken, as a man, as an eggshell breaks to disclose new action, new strength of grander, beyond human, stature. Something about our stage is needed: (i) to break the monotony of plain curtains, (ii) to suggest rugged country, and (iii) to solidify the spiritual content of our middle action. So we had constructed two other white elements, a good bit larger than our rectangular blocks, well above a man's life-size in height and breadth, with irregular edges and slants whichever way they were placed. These were put vertically, and our former blocks laid flat, diagonally, down-stage on either side: the old tidy world fallen and shattered, so to speak, and, central, the grand ruggedness upward towering. Also the use, for the first time, of four symbolic elements on the stage together gives the extra sense of a new richness of imaginative content that we need. This, then, was the intended meaning of what people called my two 'icebergs'. Such elements should be understood not as directly representing spatial facts, but as a kind of visual grammar referring to deeper significances though they are at the same time not altogether independent of the supposed 'scene', here one of rugged country. Of course, had the two 'icebergs' been too much like real blocks in shape and colour, their psychological meanings would have been lost and their exact relation to the other blocks destroyed. The use of a ramp in place of the central steps and

the tone of the sky-sheet helped to give a new sense of desolation in wide open spaces. The draping of the curtain at one side of the central opening in a wide curved downward sweep inwards helped to build an impression of harmonious irregularity.

These four elements and the ramp we used variously for main scenes during the rest of the play, without too great a positional stress on the rugged pair after the middle action. But not until the last scene of the play are the two rectangular blocks found together and upright, as at the play's beginning, only now placed at one side and sharing honour of position with the others.

Our thunder was alternated carefully with the words. Such sounds must always come in at the right time, and only then, with cues properly prepared. Sounds must not form a vague running accompaniment to words. We must aim at rhythmic alternation. This is why some people thought our thunder far more effective than that you usually get in the theatre, where rival noises are too often left to fight things out as best they may. After hesitation I succumbed to a reserved use of lightning: what there is should always be held for a fraction of a second, too sudden a flash being mechanical and artistically non-significant. Our lights were kept fairly strong always, which precludes certain pretty tableau-effects, but preserves other more important touches in the acting. You cannot have everything.

I offer an example of interpretative action. The Fool counters Lear's breaking mind with witticisms, trying to resolve by humour the tugging dualism that otherwise wrenches open the abysses of insanity. This is why his wit concentrates on the subject of Lear's pain, and not away from it. In their first tempest scene Lear goes out hand-in-hand with the Fool, who is singing his 'wind and rain' song as they exit. In the next, Lear meets mad Tom, and leaves the fool for the madman. Both were played, with variation in the position of the elements, around the centric ramp.

Tom is mainly central, but moves freely right and left during his big speeches, returning to the ramp in the centre. Action here must underline an opposition between the Fool and Tom. We must see the Fool's repeated fear whenever Tom comes near him, and also his painful loneliness at Lear's desertion. Lear's interest in Tom is necessarily crucial. At the end they go out with Lear and Tom together, Tom muttering his 'child Roland' verse, this exit making a close replica of the former, only on the other side of the stage. The Fool follows, a pathetic lonely figure. The similar yet contrasted conclusions to these two scenes underline the relation of Tom to the Fool with reference to Lear. Another point not always observed. Gloucester's 'farm-house' is not the same as Kent's (and Tom's) 'hovel'. Kent's 'This way, my lord', is addressed to a confusion of the two in Lear's distraught mind, and the general exit at this point must contrast with Tom's central entrance.

On the strength of reports from people who saw the play, I feel sure that this sort of presentation of the middle action proves the conventional attitude to the acting of *King Lear* basically unsound. If Lear's apostrophe to the elements is acted in dim lights, or in front of a picture of the English countryside, and interrupted all along by thunder, of course even the greatest actor is helpless, done after the fashion I have suggested the problems are, at least, not much harder than those in *Othello*. It must be remembered, however, that the technique of grouping, gesture, and voice should harmonize with the setting. Before the middle action Lear is an old man, during it – though with recurrent reminders of age and pathos – almost a cosmic force. Here you can employ a more extravagant use of gesture and need worry less about age in the voice. Such contrasts in the patterning and development of the poet's plan should always be reflected, as far as possible, in the technique of presentation.

The ramp lent itself to a slow winding purgatorial climbing effect when Edgar leads Gloucester off, and to the Lear



and Cordelia conclusion Compare my arrangement of the last scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, and contrast my *Macbeth* arrangement, described later, with its suggestions of descent – especially on the two occasions when Macbeth meets the Weird Sisters

## IV THE IDEAL PRODUCTION

### I

I HOLD up none of my examples for other producers necessarily to copy. You could have Hamlet perfectly well leaning against the King's throne for his long soliloquy indeed it would look quite effective. That, too, would be significant whatever you do on a formally devised set is, and must be, significant, just as, whatever you do on an unduly realistic set, is non-significant. The play's central wholeness is implicit all along its circumference, and the stage-centre, and other permanent centres of interest elsewhere, should be used to spatialize that ideological centrality and core of wholeness we discussed in our first chapter, and lend point and balance to conflicting persons facing each other across the stage. Therefore for any one producer at any one time certain movements will usually be far better than others, some will be excellent, some disastrous.

Such productions as I advocate, you may say, would never be popular. I am not so sure. I suggest no return to an archaic Elizabethanism, robbing the theatre of its usual appeals and putting nothing in their place. I urge something positive something, I believe, that if well done will always be exciting. However, I admit that my own productions may err in the direction of plainness. That is inevitable. I could not, as things are, aim at more elaborations: the rent of a theatre for three nights, hire of costumes, publicity and many minor expenses, always risk as much as I can afford. But, supposing the chance offered, could an elaborate and colourful presentation be devised, one with sense-appeal, general richness and grandeur, not conflicting with my arguments? I think so. A Shakespearian

play is a rich thing you need not deny it a rich setting

For *Romeo and Juliet* you could well arrange some permanent blazon consisting of the coats-of-arms of the two houses surmounted by the Prince's coronet Or with *The Tempest* you might for once play on darkness for the first scene *The Tempest* holds within its patterned profundity suggestion of a spiritual parable The loss of the ship in tempest reflects the tempests of mortal error, and must be strongly contrasted with the miraculous survivals on the island of music You could point this by acting the first scene in semi-darkness with confused cries and mazed circlings, as of lost souls and we could have Ariel disclosed as a creature of angelic lightning, poised flaming on the mast-head, as he describes himself to Prospero afterwards It could be done, and would be worth doing, and would assist the play's meaning far more than the elaboration of realistic seas Most plays would lend themselves to some such carefully chosen innovations

But for any extrinsic aids and decorations you invent, there is one essential condition they must point and be pointed by the significant action of the drama itself, and they must lend themselves to human and naturalistic touches in the acting The setting must be interwoven with the performance it is not enough, as I have argued earlier, to devise an elaborate artistic background – however suitable – running all the time a parallel and rival appeal to the eye All additions must interlock with both the poetry and the action I now outline some rough suggestions for the ideal production of (i) *The Merchant of Venice* and (ii) *Macbeth*

## 2

The meaning of *The Merchant of Venice* is never sufficiently brought out We must take the play seriously Its deeper significances do not, it is true, correspond at every point with a surface realism as they do in *Macbeth* But for this very reason we must take care to bring the inherent meaning out as harmoniously and as naturally, yet powerfully, as we can

This play presents two contrasted worlds Venice and Belmont The one is a world of business competition, usury, melancholy, and tragic sea-disaster, the other, a spelled land of riches, music, and romance This I show in *The Shakespearian Tempest*, pp 127-41 I know many of our Venetian scenes are comparatively jovial 'but Gratiano is scarcely a pleasant man Venice has romantic associations but here it is darkly toned The supposedly pleasant people are not all they might be Antonio is cruel to Shylock, Bassanio a spendthrift, Gratiano vulgar, and honesty certainly not the strongest point of Lorenzo and Jessica Shylock towers over the rest, grand, it is true, but scarcely amiable Observe that the tragedy depends on sea-wreck, tempests, and such like Shakespeare's usual tragedy associations But at Belmont all this is changed All the people become noble as soon as they arrive there Bassanio is the loyal friend, Lorenzo the perfect lover, Gratiano is, comparatively, subdued The name Belmont suggests a height overlooking the water-logged world of Venetian rivalry and pettiness At Belmont we have music continually at Venice, none The projected Masque we may observe does not, as far as our persons are concerned, come off after all (II, VI, 64), but it serves for Shylock's significant lines about the 'vile squealing of the wry-neck'd fife', which might be compared with his even less pretty 'bagpipe' reference later Certainly, Venice is not here a place of romantic music Belmont is And the Belmont world is dominated by Portia, expressly Christian, as against Shylock, her only rival in dramatic importance, and of infinite wealth as against the penurious Bassanio and thieving Lorenzo Everyone in Venice is in money difficulties of some sort, even the rich ones Antonio's fortune is all at sea Shylock has to borrow from Tubal, and later loses a great part of his wealth with his daughter, and bemoans his lost ducats in the street But Portia is infinitely rich Her riches hold, dramatically, an almost spiritual quality

Our permanent set must help to mark out these con-

trasted worlds I suggest dividing the stage into two levels, the rise making a straight diagonal from up L to down R. The higher level is thus mainly on stage right. Half-way along this diagonal steps can be used to lead from one level to the other. Venetian scenes will concentrate on the lower, Belmont on the higher, level. I do not mean that no Venetian in Venice should ascend the higher merely that the Venetian action should always focus on the lower with a force proportional to the particular significance. Certainly in the Belmont scenes the lower space must never be quite empty, which would tend to rob the figures above of any dignity their raised position gives them—a point we have already discussed. We can arrange a background that gives a wide and variable range of tones according to the lights; this will help. For the casket scenes the suitors enter down R or down L and ascend the steps ceremoniously. Nothing must seem too rigid, however. Portia, standing aside during Bassanio's meditations, would probably come down L on the lower level, and later meet him as he descends the steps, an action which suits the submissive femininity of her speech, and his victorious choice.

The three caskets will be large and solid-looking, and must be allowed to dominate. They are symbolically central to the play's action. At the heart of this play is the idea of riches—false and true wealth. Jesus' parables are suggested. Venice is lost in the varied complexities of the false. Portia possesses the true. Not only is love and beauty continually in Shakespeare metaphorically a matter of riches, but Portia is vitally associated with Christianity, and is, moreover, an heiress with an infinite bank-balance. In this play of greed her serene disregard of exact sums has something supernal about it.

PORTIA What sum owes he the Jew?

BASSANIO For me three thousand ducats

PORTIA What, no more?

Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond,  
Double six thousand, and then treble that

He shall have gold 'to pay the petty debt twenty times over' We must note further that Portia's office in the play is to demonstrate the futility, as a final resort, of business and legal exactitudes. The action drives home the truth that money is only an aspect of life, and that life itself must come before money and the laws of money.<sup>1</sup> The contrast is exquisitely pointed by the situation of a man giving a pound of flesh as security. Everyone wants to save his life, but there seems no loophole. His life is now subject to laws made only for money. Observe how Portia deals with the absurd situation. She dispels the clouding precisions and intellectualities of the law court by a serene common-sense. This is something very like the common-sense of Jesus. Her Mercy speech exactly reflects His teaching. Moreover, the white beam of her intuition shows, as genius has a way of showing, as Jesus' teaching so often shows, that the academic intelligence is itself vulnerable at every point by its own weapons. Shylock's worst danger is to be allowed the rights he fights for.

The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh'  
Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh,  
But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed  
One drop of Christian blood

This is what comes of not distinguishing between the counters of finance and the bread and wine, the silver flesh and golden blood, of life itself. The serene wisdom of life works always by refusing validity to false abstractions. You can cut money into bits, but not life, there any piece involves the whole. Such are the lines of Portia's reasoning, it is fundamentally a poetic and holistic reasoning. As soon as you begin to think in such poetic and holistic terms there are always certain supposed exactitudes that lose all meaning so next Portia supports her first argument by insisting that poor Shylock shall take exactly a pound of flesh,

<sup>1</sup> I acknowledge a debt in my thinking around this point to Mr Max Plowman's most illuminating note, 'Money and the Merchant,' *The Adelphi*, Sept 1931.

neither less nor more by the weight of a hair His whole position crumbles

Clearly, then, the caskets, gold, silver and lead, containing respectively death, folly and infinite love and wealth, must be solid and dominating This play is not so silly as many a modern critic would have it and many a modern production makes it

So Venice and Belmont alternate The play works up to the climax of the Trial Scene, where the protagonists of the two worlds, Portia and Shylock, meet for the first time Portia descends from Belmont almost as a divine being her office is, anyway, that of a *dea ex machina* I would have the court sitting on the high level R, some using the level itself for a seat The Duke's chair will be half-way along Bassanio and Antonio are down R, Shylock moves between up L, L, and C Some spectators can edge in down L and Gratiano stand L between them and Shylock, coming forward for his big speeches

Portia enters down R, circles up-stage to the steps, and ascends the higher level, standing beside the Duke Her doctor's gown is better neither black nor red Her doctorate is one of serene Christian wisdom and feminine intuition She never gained it at Padua Let her therefore wear a correctly cut doctor-of-laws gown of spotless white<sup>1</sup> She is high and central dominating the whole court The light should be intensified on her white gown and golden hair just showing under her cap as she speaks her Mercy speech But, as the situation ripens, she descends observe how this movement uses our levels to capture the essence of her arrival in Venice to render assistance, her *descent* from the

1 Portia at Belmont is, to Morocco, a 'shrine' and a 'mortal breathing saint' The arrival of her wooers will stress this suggestion They will face her on the steps, themselves standing below, as pilgrims before a divine sanctuary

2 Something suitable must be devised for Nerissa, who enters with Portia The gown I advocate for Portia reflects exactly that blend of realism and symbolic meaning which I regard as the essential quality of Shakespearian drama

happier world of her home She comes nearly, but not quite, down the steps at 'I pray you, let me look upon the bond' Shylock gives it her She warns him 'Shylock, there's thrice thy money offered thee' She is kind, is meeting these people on their own terms, descending to their level But Shylock will have none of it She tries again He returns to his corner, talking to Tubal, adamant Portia, on the steps, begins to prepare judgment She addresses Antonio, asks for balances and a surgeon Antonio says his farewell Now, swaying slightly, she pronounces judgment, the speed gathers as the whirl of her repetition gains force, the whirl of a lasso

The court awards it and the law doth give it,  
and

The law allows it and the court awards it

Shylock, in ecstasy of hatred, cries 'A sentence! Come, prepare!' Unleashed, he springs down-stage Bassanio shields Antonio The Duke stands The crowds murmur But at this instant Portia takes the last step down to the lower level and cuts off Shylock's attack with a raised hand 'Tarry a little' There is silence In a quiet voice she continues

there is something else  
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood

The terrible judgment of a fathomless simplicity and divine common-sense

It is, of course, an amazing scene, and its tremendous dramatic impact derives from the clash of the two dominating forces in the play, Shylock and Portia, and all that they stand for Our set of two levels with Portia's descent will assist, so will her white gown, and her significant barring of Shylock's attack at the crucial moment, which must be given expressive action We must work always from the profound issues implicit in the dramatic thrill if it is to have full power Portia's standing on the same steps where previously we have seen her meet her suitors, with the caskets



behind, priestess of the knowledge of true and false wealth, clearly helps this scene. We are aware of her bringing her own world and all it symbolizes into the new context.

For the rest of the scene do not be afraid of an anticlimax. Portia must be firm and not too pitiful. Shylock's exit, C to down L through the crowd, can be as pathetic as you will, but not too long delayed. The play shows a Christian, romantic, and expressly feminine Portia against a down-trodden, vengeful, racially grand, usurious Jew. I do not claim that all the difficulties inherent in this opposition are finally settled in our play, but I do claim that this dramatic opposition is a profound one. You must not suppose that since Portia has all our sympathy Shylock can have none. poetic drama can be paradoxical. Portia stands serene in white purity, symbol of Christian romance. But Shylock, saying he is ill, picks up his cloak and goes out robed in purple, the purple of tragedy. Two tremendous imaginative issues conflict: the romantic dream and tragic realism. Later Shakespeare is to reconcile them. Here the opposition must be stark; neither must be watered down.

The last scene at Belmont acts itself easily, but I object to so unfortunate a back-cloth as one with waves painted on it, for obvious reasons. Our set here might for the first time dispose of the change in level. The action's dualism may not have been perfectly unified, but you certainly are not supposed now to be worrying about it. Or again, you might keep it, and get highly significant comedy out of the lovers chasing each other — as they usually do — about from one level to the other. On second thoughts, I think this best. It would have meaning. Lorenzo and Jessica would be comfortably placed on the steps at the beginning.

## 3

We have referred continually in this book to *Macbeth*. Here is an outline of my ideal production. The general purpose

will be (i) to use a more or less permanent set, (ii) to arrange a rich production to bring out and solidify *with the help of the action* layers in the play's imagery and symbolism which it usually takes years of sensitive appreciation to remark and hold in the mind, and (iii) to give at last the element of supernature something like adequate projection. I shall not attempt to describe sound-effects. I have already indicated my principles in that matter. My arrangement exploits dramatically the more philosophical ideas of my essay on *Macbeth* in *The Imperial Theme*.

The stage will be mostly draped in black. There will be a semi-circular background with a ledge half-way up, and two or more high entrances there. There are entrances below variously as may be convenient. A flight of steps leads down from the ledge C, or possibly a little L of C, so that it points inward at a slight angle. There is a big dais R with a heavy and elaborate golden throne. Opposite the throne there is, L, a niche with a raised Madonna-figure and Child and an altar-like level, with a step in front, but none of it too definitely ecclesiastical. Possibly the black drapes all round are streaked with gold zig-zags here and there. Two of the entrances to the ledge show red curtains, but these and other gaps can also disclose sky for out-door effects. The stairway is carpeted first with green, later with crimson, and finally again with green. The lighting will be subtly used throughout. Especially important will be its varied play on the Madonna and the throne. These will, however, nearly always remain visible. There will be no obvious stress on coloured lights.

#### ACT I

The first scene is given on the fore-stage. I assume we should have a good one. Next, Duncan stands before the throne, the bloody Sergeant entering down L. The Madonna is well lit here and wide patches of sky show above the ledge.

The lights would then change for Macbeth's meeting

with the Witches, dimming on the Madonna. Through the openings over the ledge irregular patches of sky-sheet could show. This should then suggest a mountainous and craggy gorge. Our set lends itself to effects of descent which can be used to suggest a Dantesque circle of Hell. Having a very definite permanent set you need be less afraid of dimming corners, since the audience are already conscious of what is there and grow to have a feeling for the proper limits. The throne and Madonna are dim. The Witches meet and then circle C. Macbeth and Banquo enter on one of the ledge openings, silhouetted for a second against sky, and walk round and descend the steps. They are coming over mountain crags. The Witches prophesy grouped in front of the throne, and facing Macbeth and Banquo, who have walked down L. Macbeth advances, they melt away, and he finds himself confronted significantly by the throne, on which the lights have slightly risen. Macbeth gazes on it, as he says 'Your children shall be kings', then starts at Banquo's 'You shall be king', and turns away from it as though uninterested. 'And Thane of Cawdor, too.' During his soliloquy he stands near, and on appropriate lines regarding the throne. Banquo and the lords group down L. Macbeth comes down to meet them, while the curtain closes behind. They go off together.

Next the curtain is drawn and Duncan discovered on the throne, his sons on either side. No sky is visible: it is an interior. The Madonna and Child are bright. Macbeth and Banquo enter down L – not down the steps – and approach the dais. The King's proclamation of Malcolm's accession must be done ceremoniously, Macbeth with the others kneeling before the throne-group, this will be effective, and brings out the meaning of the situation, besides throwing forward to a later group.

The lights change and direct the eye to Lady Macbeth appearing through one of the ledge-entrances. Morning sky might show again, as through windows. She is now on the steps, reading the letter. At 'Glamis thou art' she swiftly

descends, facing the throne from the bottom step at 'shalt be what thou art promised' The servant tells of the messenger 'He brings great news', takes Lady Macbeth up-stage She refers to her 'battlements' with arms raised to the sky openings, back to the audience, next, swings round to face the Madonna and Child She deliberately challenges the figure for a second, then scornfully turns, and invokes the spirits of evil against her own sex and motherhood or she might speak boldly facing the image Macbeth enters down R crossing the throne, and does not look on it until his wife urges him They go out

Duncan and his following enter down R, and look up to the ledge, as to a battlemented castle It might be possible for lights to throw up something that suggests this After Duncan's 'Martlet' speech, Lady Macbeth descends the green stairway to meet him He confronts her standing with his sons and lords grouped before the throne

The curtains are drawn and the feast procession passes to music across the fore-stage It must be done solemnly and ritualistically, so that no one laughs, as in most *Macbeth* productions Funny-looking meats should be avoided

Next the full set is discovered with now a *red* carpet on the stairs Macbeth is standing on the lower steps of the stairway for his soliloquy His references to Duncan are made looking at the throne As his speech grows impassioned he rises, walks down-stage, and faces the Madonna for his lines on 'pity like a naked new-born babe' and 'heaven's cherubin' Finally he falls on his knees on the steps before the Madonna, looking back at the throne for the words 'vaulting ambition', then prays At Lady Macbeth's entry he rises She draws him down L, away Laughter is heard from the feast, from time to time, during their dialogue Then we have a ceremonious procession Duncan and the rest enter R There is business of some sort between the King and his hosts He, with his sons, ascends the red stairs and, half-way, turns and holds his arms in blessing over the crowded stage The grouping tends to

mask the throne here. Then all go out, some up the stairs and at different openings on the ledge, others at up-stage ground entrances, others at the wings. You should see clearly the red-curtained door of Duncan's exit on the ledge.

The lights change. Night sky is seen at openings over the ledge. Banquo enters below with Fleance<sup>1</sup>, then Macbeth and a servant. During this subtle dialogue the throne, close to Macbeth, can catch Banquo's eye significantly on the words 'To you they have shown some truth'. Macbeth stands with his back to it, for 'I think not of them'. The Madonna is dim. Macbeth is left alone. The air-drawn dagger points up the red stairs. He follows it a step or two. Then he banishes it, turning, and facing the darkly glowing throne with lustful eye. He now succumbs utterly to evil and speaks the Tarquin lines. He regards the throne again at 'Whiles I threat, he lives'. The bell sounds. He crouches up the stairs and along the ledge to Duncan's room.

Lady Macbeth enters up R, lower level. Macbeth's reappearance is easy. You watch his zig-zag course, along and down. For his agonized 'sleep no more' speeches he sinks on the dais step, a puny, miserable figure under the vast throne. You see how it offers him no pleasure, indeed, is clearly not his at all. Lady Macbeth ascends the stairs and returns. The knocking is ominous. They go out and the Porter enters, and then Macduff and Lennox. Macduff is all efficiency, sharp with the Porter, afraid of being late, precise and military. He and Macbeth confront each other before the Madonna and throne respectively. Macbeth offers to take Macduff up, but his nerve fails, and he points 'This is the door'.

At the general discovery of the murder people crowd in from all the entrances. Banquo and Macduff are respec-

<sup>1</sup> Suppose, during their short dialogue, that Fleance sits on the throne, and that the first article handed him by his father is held like a sceptre. Observe how the incident, and dialogue, proceeds to flower (1947)

tively in front of the throne and Madonna, Malcolm and Donalbain down R. The King's people are massed down R and L. Macbeth stands at the foot of the red stairs, his retainers slanting off on either side and above, the apex of a wedge spined with crimson. A kind of arrow-head. Macduff L speaks his 'Wherefore did you so?' with a challenging ring, Banquo his lines

In the great hand of God I stand, and thence  
Against the undivulg'd pretence I fight  
Of treasonous malice

with one foot on the throne steps. After the rest go, Malcolm and Donalbain can show a definite suspicion of Macbeth, regarding the stairs significantly.

The choric commentary of Ross and the Old Man is to be done as a front-scene. Macduff, entering later, must appear meditative, unwilling to express his full suspicions, but darkly meaningful and thoughtful. This ends Act I.

## ACT II

Banquo enters in the full set and uses reference to the throne freely to point his words, standing C. Then Macbeth and Lady Macbeth enter from above with a couple of attendants, and come down the crimson-carpeted stairs. Banquo draws R to the throne-step. The stage fills from lower entrances LC and down L. Macbeth is again the apex of a crowd, as he comes down C. The repetition is significant. Banquo, with Fleance, is R, and seems for a second to be barring Macbeth's approach to the throne. Then he bows and the incident melts, as he steps aside and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth cross. This is the second of a series of incidents where Banquo is related closely to the throne. Now we have a small wooden throne for Lady Macbeth down-stage of the gold one, beside it which points the proper quality of Lady Macbeth's position, quite subsidiary to Macbeth's kingship. Her unselfishness is a platitude of commentary. Macbeth in his throne looks lost. It is so big

An all but ludicrous effect is wanted <sup>1</sup> After Banquo's exit, the others go and leave Macbeth alone. He rises quickly from the throne as if with relief. "To be thus is nothing." Referring to Banquo's 'royalty of nature' he looks on it, bringing to our minds the two incidents when Banquo has, as it were by chance, seemed positionally to possess it. Macbeth asserts himself as he defies fate towards the end of his soliloquy. He can, as it were, attack the image of Banquo, sweeping it from the throne, banishing it like the air-drawn dagger. Then swiftly turns, nervous, at "Who's there?" He stands on the throne steps as he addresses the murderers. Then goes out. Lady Macbeth returns. The Servant goes out down-stage somewhere. Lady Macbeth sees her husband re-enter and stand gazing at the Madonna. She quickly draws him away, telling him to banish 'sorriest fancies' and all thoughts that should die with the dead. She leads him to his throne, would put him there, and try to love seeing him there, as a mother puts her baby to rest. He sits in it for "We have scotch'd the snake, not killed it." She kneels, and caresses him. "Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks." Macbeth breaks from her, but still sitting, and hints aside of some 'deed of dreadful note'. She, anxious, rises and importunately draws to him, holds his arm. "What's to be done?" Now he breaks from her altogether, rises, and from the throne steps invokes night and evil. She is fearful, bereft of speech.

The murder of Banquo is done as a front-scene.

For the feast we have our full set. There is one big table running diagonally down L at whatever exact angle may be most convenient. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are in their thrones. Guests are at the table. Macbeth's other chair is at the table's up-stage end, which is quite near the base of the stairs. Macbeth talks to the murderer on the stairs where

1 There is authority in the text

Now does he feel his title  
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe  
Upon a dwarfish thief

the Ghost is to come from Then he comes down R On his lines referring to Banquo the Ghost walks slowly and deliberately down the red stairs and sits in Macbeth's table-chair, which is slightly raised, giving the Ghost a dominant position Lady Macbeth comes down R and talks to Macbeth aside The Ghost exits into the shadows up R behind the throne On its next entrance it appears down R, stalks to the dais and *sits in the throne* Macbeth on his second reference to Banquo has taken possession of the table-chair as if to make sure of no more accidents, but only finds he has driven the Ghost to a still more terrible position the very one he most hates to associate with Banquo Macbeth finally advances to the throne steps and violently banishes it, repeating the movement I introduced earlier Note Macbeth's courage in face of the supernatural Every time he shakes portentous nightmares from him It was the same with the dagger, and see how he curses the Witches later He treats them like dirt His humanity never bends under these sub-human horrors He never abrogates his status of man This is important and forms – or should – a large part of our admiration His bark is thus 'tempest-toss'd' but 'cannot be lost' The Ghost's exit is a simple turn left and round along the dais into shadows, quickly obscured behind the tall throne The guests go out L and up R Alone together Macbeth and Lady Macbeth stay by the thrones, Macbeth is sunk on the dais, his wife kneels, ministering to him At 'Come, we'll to sleep' they cross and start to ascend the stairs, slowly, like Adam and Eve, hand-in-hand Half-way up, Macbeth stops and speaks his last couple of lines, looking on the disordered remains of the banquet 'My strange and self-abuse' Again they move up, slowly, laboriously

The Hecate scene is done on the fore-stage Then we go back to the feast scene All is just as we left it, overturned chairs and all But the lights have changed Especially the Madonna-figure is picked out brilliantly whereas for our Banquet scene it was only normal Lennox and a Lord enter,



looking surreptitious and stealthy, up-stage Their dialogue is done more or less C They speak softly At Lennox' lines 'Some holy angel ' they come down, perhaps kneel, to the Madonna The advantages of doing this dialogue from our full set are obvious The Lord can point to the disarranged remnants, tumbled cups, and so on for his words

We may again  
Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,  
Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives

The words point the moral of the Banquet scene, let the action do so, too

We cannot run on at once to the Cauldron scene, as the table has to be moved I suggest we draw the curtain, and all lights are down In the darkness you hear the thunder and the Witches' first speeches, this can go on as long as may be necessary Then the lights come up on our full set with the cauldron C and the three Witches at their work round it The sky shows in craggy strips above We are in one of the lowest circles of Hell, the 'pit of Acheron' The Madonna-figure is dim for this Black Mass if we use Hecate's entrance, she will appropriately obscure it, down L The Witches between their chants can variously twirl away a little up the stairs or on to the dais Macbeth appears above and speaks from half-way down the stairs 'What is't you do?' The throne is not clearly visible Macbeth stands before it The Witches are now down-stage of the cauldron and, when the Apparitions are to appear, group themselves diagonally LC facing up-stage, close to the cauldron The Apparitions come from the cauldron C, very solid and distinct They could be dummy figures and their words spoken in turn by each of the Witches this may even be the original intention The thunder is very loud Macbeth cowers instinctively before the Crowned Child though part of the little conflict-drama<sup>1</sup> it is itself a powerful life-symbol The

<sup>1</sup> See either *The Shakespearean Tempest*, pp 192-3, or *The Christian Renaissance*, pp 63-4 See also p 178 below (note)

words, however, reassure him Macbeth demands to know more The Witches get C above the cauldron Macbeth, back to the audience, fiercely advances, and the cauldron sinks, obeying the text It almost seems as if Macbeth has stamped it out of existence The Witches, and Hecate, draw back, moving backwards, up the stairs as though fearful, as they should be, of what follows Macbeth, C, sees the throne loom out, the lights coming up on it and the Madonna Music sounds The kings enter up R and down R variously, each pausing before Macbeth, and in turn grouping themselves round the throne, like a photograph group All Macbeth's words must be audible Pauses are no difficulty let it be all done with deliberation and ceremony Balls and sceptres and the glass should be visibly solid Finally, the Ghost of Banquo enters and takes his place in the throne itself Banquo's continual possession of the throne during the middle action is most significant His royalty is spiritual, relative, and real, Macbeth's selfish, lustful, and unreal This is why Banquo worries Macbeth so much Now the whole group is complete Macbeth stands C between it and he bright Madonna The effect is splendid and solid The kings as they enter must give Macbeth a good look usually they just peep at him through gauze The group then melts away, ceremoniously, moving with dignity, the lights on them dimming Lights could for once go down all round the stage leaving Macbeth alone illuminated C, a pin-point of burning consciousness in Hell There is thunder and galloping of horses Later we have a realistic explanation, but meanwhile they can be associated with the Witches' departure, riding through midnight storm-wrack Often in Shakespeare a realistic structure provides a sound of more general import as in the music preluding the middle action of *Othello*, and the sound-effects in *Hamlet* After the Witches vanish, all the lights go up, the sky-strips are again red-urtained doors, the wild nightmare crags are the corridors of his own palace He stands dazed, in sudden daylight He stares at the throne and dais late occupied by Banquo

and his descendants, and the stairs, where the Witches were last hunched up. He covers his eyes in agony. Lennox enters.

Observe our use of the throne in relation to Banquo during the middle action. Just before the murder, Macbeth, himself in front of it, confronts Banquo's innuendo speech. After the murder, Banquo stands on its steps for 'In the great hand of God I stand.' Banquo, in the soliloquy that starts our second act, will have gazed on it at the start, 'Thou hast it now', and also as he remembers the prophecy concerning his own sons. Macbeth next finds him significantly in front of it, but sits in it himself whilst questioning Banquo about his journey. Now follow three incidents of rising intensity. First, Macbeth images Banquo in the throne during his own soliloquy, next, the actual Ghost sits there at the banquet, and, third, Banquo, with all his line, possesses it in the Cauldron scene. We may remember the early group of Duncan and his sons. Our production must reflect the poet's skill in keeping before our eyes Banquo's 'royalty of nature' and all it stands for of creative kinship. Thoughts of Banquo dominate the middle action.

### ACT III

The murder of Lady Macduff can be best done before simple curtains. Generally it gets laughter. It is, however, not meant to hold any grandeur of action. Macbeth's exploits get less and less dignified and more mad. They are meant to. Duncan's murder was tragically grand, Banquo's melodramatic, and this is almost ludicrous. The producer must bring out its quality of ghoulish and stupid horror fearlessly and significantly and no one will laugh. You must avoid a lot of screams at the end.

The English scene is done also before curtains. A green background would do well.

We return to our main set for the sleep-walking. Lady Macbeth comes down the red stairs and later reascends them. Her candle will be put on the throne dais, or the

stairs She fingers the throne with the action of blindness At one point she comes near the Madonna, perhaps touches the altar-level in front, and shrinks away whimpering She moves about the stage, living its significances The Doctor's 'God, God, forgive us all' can be spoken with some reference to the Madonna, which should be palely lit

From now the action speeds up A short military front-scene, with martial drums, shows troops gathering to meet Malcolm Then we have our full set the sky-sheet shows in places above to give some effect of battlements, but lights are gloomy and autumnal for Macbeth's passage of tragic loneliness and the Doctor's lines on Lady Macbeth The stairway is now green again Now follows a second short scene, with martial music getting louder and nearer for Malcolm's and Macduff's approach The play is growing brighter <sup>1</sup> Notice the repeated direction 'drum and colours' for Malcolm and his supporters, which is answered by Macbeth's 'Hang out our banners on the outward walls' Both sides share in the awakening Macbeth is reckless and flings himself in the throne He is almost happy There is action, colour, and sane purpose at last, replacing nightmare and actions that beat only the dark and torment the doer Macbeth no longer fears a night-shriek he has all but won through Hearing of his wife's death he first moves towards the Madonna, as if to pray, but turns away

She should have died hereafter,  
There would have been a time for such a word

The messenger announcing the movement of Birnam Wood comes from above Martial music sounds louder and very close for another front-scene 'Now near enough your

<sup>1</sup> We want our lights to grow sensibly brighter during this last movement That does not mean that all the middle action must be done in half darkness that is the usual kind of mistake producers fall into All that is necessary is for this movement to start dark, quickly get bright enough for clear expression but with a certain toning of atmospheric and autumnal suggestion, and gradually increase to a brilliant conclusion

leafy screens throw down ' I think these are best suggested off stage Then our full set, for the last time The sky-sheet shows more than ever before The stage is very light Macbeth fights Siward, and goes off Macduff enters During his short speech - 'My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still' - he might get some business with the Madonna-altar, dedicating his sword to her and praying He goes off up the stairs Malcolm and Siward enter from down L and cross, going out down R Macbeth re-enters, and is by his throne as Macduff confronts him coming down the stairs He is killed finally below the Madonna and Child The body lies on the steps before it, sacrificed We remember Macduff's slaughtered wife and children, and Lady Macbeth's speech invoking the desecration of motherhood

The rest is easy At the conclusion Malcolm ascends the throne, or at the least stands on its step Macduff remains close to the Madonna for the final group Malcolm might in some way use the Madonna for his phrase 'the grace of Grace' as might Old Siward earlier The lights are bright, the sky above as brilliant as possible, for the first time exposed all the way round the curving ledge, crowning the stage with a wide circle of light

I have hurried these last descriptions, not because the last scenes are weak or unimportant, but because they depend more on a quick time sequence and martial sounds than on spatial significances

Such is my outline Observe that I have used a permanent set for all big scenes, and have preserved an impression of weight and solidity throughout The main impressions I have used are

(1) *The throne*, which covers the various royalty-symbolism of our play, gold crowns and sceptres, etc., and the whole matter of kingship, rightful (for Duncan and Malcolm), wrongful (for Macbeth), or spiritual and prophetic (for Banquo)

(ii) *The red stairway*, mainly suggesting blood, which is a powerful impression throughout. My arrangement of the carpets will be best understood by considering that the play moves from social and natural order through nightmare and blood to daylight sanity and a new harmony.

(iii) *The green stairway* at the beginning and end, suggesting nature and social harmony generally, an integral conception to be contrasted with the unnatural and nightmarish evil and related to the child-with-a-tree, the martlet's nest, the wren passage, the Birnam Wood incidents, and numerous other nature references, and also thoughts of honour and integrity generally.

(iv) *The Madonna and Child*, relating to frequent Christian imagery of purity, angels, and divine grace, closely associated with child-thoughts, Lady Macbeth's invocation of evil to dry up in her breasts the milk of human and feminine tenderness, her 'I have given suck', the 'naked new-born babe', the two child apparitions, Macduff's family, etc. The symbolism blends with the creative royalty of Banquo and his descendants.

I have not attempted to discuss sounds. They must be given exact attention: music for Duncan's feast and the show of Banquo's kings and, if we use it, the Witches' dance with Hecate, thunder continually, especially for the Witches and the three Apparitions, continually nearing martial sounds for Malcolm's army, and the strange effect of horses galloping, twice at least, which relates to the nightmarish atmosphere very aptly. By working this – as, indeed, on occasion other sounds – with growing volume from behind the audience, you can temporarily enclose the whole theatre in the play's action. The ideal performance would also embody many strands and trains of imagery and thought too subtle or intangible for static visual projection. The questions, the mazed bafflement, the essential darkness of the play, might be reflected into appropriate turns and gestures.

If my description here appears to lay too much emphasis

on universal meanings, and seems rather like an X-ray of the play, exposing its skeleton, that is because I have concentrated only on certain moments. These should not appear obtrusive when embedded in the whole.

I claim that some such production is called for. I have not explained all the significances, but, if studied, these arrangements will be found to vitalize the play continually. The objects used are drawn from and react on the story itself and the poetry of its expression. We must aim to reveal the profound issues implicit in particular events, to bring into prominence the things which make *Macbeth* great dramatic literature rather than rhetorical melodrama. The average production rarely gets beyond good melodrama, and sometimes fails to reach that. Sometimes, of course, effects are imaginatively right and powerful by subconscious understanding, but there is little conscious and systematic exploitation of the author's pattern. There is little beyond a direct realistic abstraction from the concrete significances of Shakespeare's poetry, or, if there is anything 'symbolic', the symbols come, not from the play itself, but out of the producer's mind.

#### AFTERTHOUGHT (1947)

I reprint this essay with certain reservations.

(1) It should be read as an extreme and purely suggestive development of certain sound principles. What is important is, not the details but, the *direction* of my attempt. No such intellectual plan is likely to stand in practice without modification. My Stowe production (1942) was inevitably done on very different lines (with young boys for Apparitions, head or naked bodies lit from darkness, green, red, white). Possibly the solids suggested might be of more use in rehearsal, to focalize action and grouping, than in actual performance, or even held merely as images in the producer's mind.

(ii) The Madonna-figure, in spite of my 'not too ecclesiastical', points rather dangerously to a rigid orthodoxy. It may be safer to feel the play's Christian tonings, which are richer than is normally supposed,<sup>1</sup> as part only of a wild naturalism of birth and creation, while limiting the specifically Christian to the English court. There appears to be too much domesticity in the carpet, though there again the external authority is strong. The throne may be allowed.

(iii) If used, the objects might be slabbed out in rough modernistic fashion from a setting of not dissimilar substance, being themselves denied a too assertive particularity, so that the throne and Madonna could be taken, under certain lights, for rocks. Under such a treatment many difficulties might dissolve.

1 See my earlier studies of *Macbeth*, and also Mr Roy Walker's recent *The Time is Free* (Dakers, 1949).



## V

### SHAKESPEARE AND RITUAL

GREAT drama is something more than entertainment. Rather I would call it a ceremony in which actors and audience share in the formal unfurling of some deeply significant pattern. So the better you know a great play, the richer your gain: there should be little element of excitement as to what shall happen. Or rather your knowledge of the future disclosure actually increases your delight in its awaited surprise. Remember Bottom's remark - 'You shall see, it will fall pat as I told you. Yonder she comes.' That goes deep into the nature of dramatic art. The Greek and Elizabethan dramatists alike were fond of well-known tales. For, by knowing the future and overlooking the whole, whether you be actor or audience, you become fully conscious of life's patterned progress, for awhile entering a state unattained in actual affairs except at rare moments. You rise above the story's purely sequential nature. People often ask whether an actor should feel and live his part or rather work from a cold and impersonal intellectual height, but the question is futile, since he must do both. He must be lost in his part while rising above it. He must live it intensely, but with the felt intensity of art. An actor's efforts must always be given with a certain conscious precision, often signalling to the audience the kind of reaction desired. An audience will often laugh at, or take seriously, a certain effect according to what they think is expected of them. This is a psychological fact, apart from theory, that must never be forgotten. There must be, therefore, a blend of conscious artistry with spontaneous feeling. This very blend is the supreme necessity. As in a dance you may lose your self-consciousness to realize it differently in terms of acquired technique and orchestral rhythm, so audience and

actors lose themselves for a purpose, and, living in that purpose, attain an exquisite awareness wherein the temporal succession becomes the edge of some more solid and rounded dimension. There is a still wider analogy that of the saint whose consciousness enjoys perfect freedom in subjection, wherein the antinomy of free-will and predestination is resolved. So there is always, and must be, an element of conscious forward-knowing artistry, of artistic purpose, evident in the whole performance and its reception. A famous painter used to advise beginners to make their work 'look as though it were painted', and not to attempt to deceive the eye. But how often do you find 'naturalness' the only criterion of popular and even enlightened dramatic appreciation? It is all wrong, or, at least, some of it is. A production should look like a production, and look as though it knows it, an actor should even look as though he were acting. If he did not we should all accuse him with one voice of incompetence. I ask only that we acknowledge what we already know, and consciously accept the conventions on which drama rests and of which Shakespeare makes superb use. This is the way to a convincing and honest sincerity, and the only medium of a richly human appeal. I would blaze a trail to no esoteric and stiff intellectualism, but to a proper projection of Shakespeare's synthesis of flexible detail with permanent architectonic, of varied human insight with universal meaning. So I approve a permanent and solid-looking set whose clear definitions and constraining limits give point and power to the active and intensely significant human interplay they enclose. Something we must have that acts as efficiently as a cartridge case and looks as business-like as the smooth blue-black unmetal of a rifle barrel. Without such consciously artistic compression in set, general arrangement, and acting technique you will rob the play's explosive force of its right detonation and lingering reverberations.

A Shakespearian play demands in places an almost ritualistic performance. There is explicit suggestion of this even

in the romantic comedies. We have the formal conclusion to *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night*. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ends with ceremonious dance and formal procession. *Much Ado About Nothing* has a dance. Hymen's entry towards the close of *As You Like It* is most important, and our critical reception, or rejection, of it a characteristic symptom. Richly comic action is crowned continually with a formalistic conclusion. Even *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are by way of being moral tracts, with studied moral emphasis at the end. Both stories end, like that of *The Comedy of Errors*, with a feast, staged or suggested. Most of these romances exploit and expand the dream-desires of a romantic aspiration. They are variously toned with transcendental suggestion. Each dreams a world of melody where mistakes are rectified, desires fulfilled, and all live happy ever after. Shakespeare exploits to the full the deep content of the happy-ending romance, perhaps the world's most universal art-form. We must not let twentieth-century cynicism have its way with such creations: they existed long before our time and will exist after. Our failure to recognise profundities here is our, not their, limitation. Each such romance is a day-dream, if you will, but one that outlines Paradise, and as such must be read, and with some such ceremonious understanding, performed.

The early Romances explore paradises of personal desire: they are visions of harmony, of union. But the Histories pursue a sterner task, developing the rough antagonisms of England's story in terms of military ardour and honour and, especially, the ideal of kingship. A Shakespearian play, aiming always at the universal through the personal, necessarily finds the king, in whom already these two categories blend, a pregnant centre of action. So the problems of England converge mercilessly on Shakespeare's kings. The succession is epic, almost biblical, the swing and ceremony of England's story. Remember the divinity of Richard II, and how the curse of his deposition and death is not lifted until Henry's noble prayer before Agincourt.

To all these kingly plays we must bring some sense of the sacramental. They challenge our modern understanding on a vital issue. Kingship or hero-worship of some sort is closely related to the essence of poetic drama, which seems, indeed, never properly to have recovered from the execution of Charles I. Today the problem, to the would-be dramatic artist, is baffling indeed. How many plays of Shakespeare are without their king or duke? Even the fairies are a royalistic community. Kingship is central to Shakespeare's life-pattern, and whatever our political philosophy we must receive such significances correctly and unfold them on the stage with due ceremonial and a willing suspension of disrespect. They are grand plays. They surge with the tumultuous energy of the soul of a nation, and are rich in the pride, pomp, and circumstantial panoply of world-power. Listen to Henry V. He is meditating on kingly 'ceremony'

No, thou proud dream  
That play'st so subtly with a king's repose,  
I am a king that find thee, and I know  
'Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,  
The sword, the mace, and crown imperial,  
The intertissued robe of gold and pearl,  
The farced title running 'fore the king,  
The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp  
That beats upon the high shore of this world,  
No, not all these, thrice gorgeous ceremony,  
Not all these, laid in bed majestical,  
Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave

This intuition of kingly grandeur is vastly different from Marlowe's. Shakespeare would never allow the indignities suffered by Edward II. For Shakespeare's kingly sequence celebrates the unfurling of a nation's history towards the destiny outlined in Chaucer's prophecy in *Henry VIII*.

But there are kings of material and kings of spiritual authority, and I often think the noble sleep-speeches of Shakespeare's three royally-burdened Henrys reflect something of his own, spiritual, royalty and its pain. Often in the histories there is sharp interplay and psychic inward drama

between these conflicting authorities in Richard II, in all the Henrys. The saintly Henry VI outlines the contrast

My crown is in my heart, not on my head,  
Not deck'd with diadems and Indian stones,  
Nor to be seen, my crown is called content,  
A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy

(On the spiritual kingship in the heart of man turn the great tragedies. In them also worldly power twines with hierarchies of spiritual initiation. The tragic hero is usually a king, or at least a great soldier. In *Hamlet*, in *Othello*, in *Timon of Athens*, in *King Lear*, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, an overmastering spiritual force battles at, interlocks with, overthrows the more material ceremony with its own, ritualistic and mystic, rite. The utmost glory of world power is seen incomplete and, its royalty renounced, forced into a new and dwarfing context of the infinite and eternal, doing homage to the mystery of the tragic sacrifice.)

What is, then, this mystery dwarfing life's positives with a seeming negation? It is close-entwined with the ritualistic concept of sacrifice. We have authority in Shakespeare's own words. His mind thinks variously in such terms. Here is a pagan and militaristic expression

Let them come,  
They come like sacrifices in their trim,  
And to the fire-eyed maid of smoky war  
All hot and bleeding shall we offer them  
The mailed Mars shall on his altar sit  
Up to the ears in blood

So Hotspur. Orsino is likewise somewhat pagan

I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love  
To spite a raven's heart within a dove

But the pagan intuition can blend with a more strictly ethical fervour. To Brutus the assassination of Caesar is a spiritual and ritualistic act

Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius  
We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,  
And, in the spirit of men, there is no blood

For Caesar's death is demanded not by man's envy and greed, but by a divine necessity

Let s carve him as a dish fit for the gods,  
Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds

Which recalls a similar phrase from *Antony and Cleopatra* Just before Cleopatra's death, the peasant, during a dialogue pregnant of suggestion deeply concerned with the nature of her end, sees that end as a sacrifice

I know that a woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not But truly these same whoreson devils do the gods great harm in their women, for in every ten that they make, the devils mar five

That is, the protagonist's tragedy is itself a divinely ordained sacrifice we are close to a more Christian concept

The end of *Othello* is sublimely formal, the bed an altar, with wedding sheets, the candle beside it, as an altar-flame, and the chaste stars and virgin moon without The word 'sacrifice' occurs

O perjur'd woman! Thou dost stone my heart,  
And makest me call what I intend to do  
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice

Othello's words and acts in this scene have throughout a strong religious and ritualistic colouring Or in *King Lear*, Lear and Cordelia reunite in a temporary paradise where the mind is waked from distraught agony to music She is a soul in bliss', but he still bound on 'a wheel of fire', like Desdemona meeting Othello 'at compt' and hurling his soul from Heaven But they are later to be 'God's spies', living only for simple love, and seeing therefore the 'mystery of things'

Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,  
The gods themselves throw incense

For this is the renunciation of all pride of mind, 'all passion spent' but spent, as a temporal price, for an eternally enduring wisdom Sacrifice is a recurrent conception We find

the word as early as *Romeo and Juliet*. Looking on the dead lovers, who die that Verona may learn to live in peace, Capulet knows they are 'poor sacrifices to our enmity', and in what is, perhaps, the finest tragic passage in Shakespeare, Buckingham would have the citizens

Make of your prayers one sweet sacrifice  
And lift my soul to Heaven

Shakespeare sees human tragedy as essentially a sacrifice. A writer of very similar cast of intuition, Hardy, in his greatest book, follows the thought. Read the noble passage where Angel Clare tells Tess that she lies on an ancient ruined altar to the sun, at Stonehenge.

I think here we draw close to one aspect of the tragic mystery: its relation to morality. Is Hardy fundamentally an unchristian writer, or *King Lear* a dangerously pagan play? Wherein lies the morality of tragedy? Life flows and ebbs in rhythms. There are necessary rhythms of creation and destruction throughout animal life and natural evolution. Within man's personal existence these take ethical shapes of (i) self-assertion, and (ii) self-sacrifice. The universe is patterned on such rhythmic alternations, conscious or otherwise. Now in the tragic sacrifice we watch objectified the essential grandeur and positive thrust of the sacrificial act. Quite apart from the morality of the hero — or the 'justice' of his end — this general principle claims our assent. We are held first by a metaphysical rather than a moral recognition. We share its direction, but the direction, in us, becomes next inevitably conscious and moral. We begin to know sacrifice as a positive rhythm, twin to creation. This positive quality is finely pointed in the prologue and action of *Romeo and Juliet*. The lovers themselves do not act with specific moral intention, but we watch their love-sacrifice automatically prove creative. The result in us is to induce an understanding, more, a temporary living, of the sacrificial thrust. So with all high tragedy we are initiated into one vast and difficult swing of the piston-pulse of the

universal law conditioning and enclosing all existence. Morality is thus the living consciously the difficult principles implicit in the unconscious processes of nature. It interprets into self-conscious action the existent laws of the universe.

Marlowe's heroes die unheroically: Tamburlain from an internal disease, Faustus in terror, the Jew in his own booby-trap, Edward in a dungeon of filth. But Shakespeare's are best dying up-stage, usually (though not in *Macbeth* for obvious reasons) central, raised, as on an altar. Shakespeare suggests a ritualistic close continually: the four captains arraying off Hamlet, Bolingbroke following Richard's 'unimely bier', Brutus lying in state in Octavius' tent, the tragic loading' of the tomb in *Romeo and Juliet* and the bed in *Othello*, the more stark picture of Cordelia in Lear's arms, Cleopatra with her girls dying before and after, paralleled by the three crosses in the New Testament. There is something pictorial and positive about these you do not find so consistently exploited in other tragic artists. Notice the formality, the noble reserve, of the final speeches, or the final sounds, as in *Hamlet*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Coriolanus*. Even you get a suggestion of height, raising the dignity of the tragic act.

Come, Dolabella, see

*High* order in this great solemnity

Or, with more exact relevance to my argument

Give order that these bodies

*High* on a stage be placed to the view

recall another and greater tragedy: 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me'. So Shakespeare's heroes are used in turn as sacrificial offerings: they go robed and arraigned to their end. I am thinking of Cassius' wreath, Ophelia's garland of flowers, Lear's crown of 'idle weeds', Desdemona's bridal sheets, above all, of Cleopatra robed and imperially diademed for a new Cydnus and the spousal ceremony of death: 'Husband, I come'.



In *Antony and Cleopatra* the tragic sacrifice becomes admittedly and consciously a pure positive, an adventure and in expansion. The great tragedies break the shell of the poet's tragic intuition, and henceforth a new and miraculous life-intuition takes our stage. This is something not wholly unlike the romance dreams of *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, which were, in their own kind, serious plays enough. But Shakespeare never subjected his mind wholly to romance, always parallel was the history succession, presenting burdened kings and martial conflict in place of dreams. The tragedies blend the more personal and spiritual essence of the comic Romances with the communal and realistic essence of the Histories. Next, the broken shell and new-winged intuition of the Final Plays show youthful dreams mystically reopening beyond the sacrificial agony. These plays, too, need urgently some almost ritualistic understanding, one that recalls parallels in ancient myth of death and rebirth.

Surely we need not emphasize that sensitive and significant planning in production are here, more than ever, necessary. Here for the first time Shakespeare has left often elaborate and careful directions for ceremonial. But we have no easy task. Think of the plays concerned. In *Pericles* think of Cerimon the recluse raising Thaisa from the dead in a scene insistently recalling the raising of Lazarus, of Pericles and Marina on the barge at Mitylene reunited after the night of fasting sorrow, to the mystic onrush of a spheric music, of the vision of Diana that follows, of the descent of the priestess Thaisa from Diana's chapel, meeting her lost lord, as the dead unite beyond the grave.

This, this No more, you gods! Your present kindness  
Makes my past miseries sport

In *The Winter's Tale* there is the oracle of Apollo and its decisive message, there is the contrast of wintry passion and tragedy with the rebirth of the year, the sheep-shearing festival, and the young Perdita, a seed sown in winter, but

blossoming in spring Is it chance that Perdita talks of Dis and Proserpine? Is there not a clear relation between this play and season myths of antiquity, and between those and our own concepts of death and resurrection? And here Hermione descends to the repentant and suffering Leontes, as Thaisa to Pericles, a marbled and memorial statue new-waked in the 'chapel' by Paulina's music Temples, chapels, oracles, resurrections, and the rhythmic swing of seasons, of death and rebirth plays rich with mythical symbols and religious formalism In *Cymbeline* there is more Here we have a close-woven pattern with similar reunion themes We have the pagan glory of the sun-worship of the royal boys, Guiderius and Arviragus, the apocalyptic Vision of Jupiter with full and expanded direction for ceremonial, the prophetic tablet, the Soothsayer and his dream of 'Jove's bird', and the formal and ceremonious conclusion The others were kingly plays here the King, as king, is still more important The union of the realms of England and Rome is deeply significant, and the new peace ratified by sacrifice

Laud we the gods,  
And let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils  
From our blest altars

There is more, very much more, in *Cymbeline*, than has as yet been realized

What of *The Tempest*? It is too packed with relevant material to be considered now Let me point instead to Mr Colin Still's book, *Shakespeare's Mystery Play*, and my own analyses in *The Crown of Life* and *The Shakespearian Tempest* [It sums and completes the more spiritual progress of Shakespeare's genius, compacting dominant past symbols, and expanding a highly condensed pattern of universal suggestion often closely related to ideas embedded in myth, ritual, and poetry of all ages Here, too, you have a king, or duke, and temporal and spiritual lordship are contrasted As for *Henry VIII*, we have already referred to its importance its tragic mysticism, its vision of Paradise, its sense of

a sacramental kingship in Henry himself, and, in Cranmer's prophecy, of England's almost Messianic destiny. Here Shakespeare blends all his worlds, of tragedy, of romance (in Henry's marriage with Anne Bullen, to which we are forced by the text to give a purely romantic assent), of paradisaical vision, and of England, her king, her imperial future. The whole is impregnated heavily with a ceremonial, ritualistic grandeur and a noble, orthodox Christianity.

That is not strange. Christianity has all the time been implicit in Shakespeare's work, and the two today form a necessary and most fertile commentary on each other. Each of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is a miniature Christ. That is why I have urged the importance of Romeo's tragic ascent, his little Calvary. Richard II makes the comparison, and the analogy is pointed twice in *Timon of Athens*. Commentators from time to time make such a cross-reference in discussing *King Lear*, suggested partly perhaps by his crown of country weeds. After all, the New Testament is itself dramatic, a tragic art-form of unique force and unique reality. And if its 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' is spoken from the *Lear* or Hardy sense of bleak cosmic desolation, the sublime *τετέλεσται* nevertheless circumferences the whole nature of the tragic sacrifice, the consummation, the positive thrust, the creativeness. Yet also the references to Paradise from the Cross and the last 'Into thy hands', and especially the later resurrection, all these correspond to the resurrections and reunions of the Final Plays. Shakespeare was influenced by Christianity, no doubt. Who in the modern world was not? But primarily I stress, whatever our private views on the New Testament or Shakespeare, that both are recording the same facts, whatever the nature of those facts, and however strange and indecipherable they appear to a less sensitive generation.

Today orthodox Christianity and Shakespeare confront each other with a contrast and similarity that challenge our attention. What is the relation of the Shakespearian play to the Christian Mass? The Mass or Communion Ser

vice is at once a consummation and transcending of pagan ritual. The organic growth was continuous. Paganism knew sacrifice to be essentially a creative and life-giving force, hence their various ceremonies, sometimes cruel and sadistic, often superstitious, that is, bearing an unprofitable and usually dangerous relation to actual affairs, sometimes closely approaching Christianity.

The king was important in pagan ritual, his life, the life of the community, his death, their death, his renewal, then redemption and resurrection. In paganism, too, we have the dying and resurrected god. In Christianity we find these blended, with a king not of temporal but of spiritual power and authority, and one whose sacrifice is a consciously willed act wherein ritual and ethic become one. In the New Testament the Christ's kingship is contrasted with temporal royalty, with Herod and Caesar, and yet itself given the tragic insignia of purple, the proclamation written over the cross and the crown of thorns. These are the two kingships whose intershading recurs continually in Shakespeare. In the Christian Mass we act over again Christ's sacrifice, remembering it as a willed and purposeful self-surrender to destruction, and recognizing the creative power of such surrender. We are to feed on the bread and wine of that once-given sacrificial act, and afterwards, the praise, the opening hope, the remembered resurrection of the Christ and renewal of ourselves. Now in the world of Shakespearian tragedy this unique act of the Christ sacrifice can, if we like, be felt as central. Shakespeare gives us a human and infinitely varying interpretation of the sacrificial ceremony, but the deep relation is important. Moreover, Shakespeare's final plays celebrate the victory and glory, the resurrection and renewal, that in the Christian story and in its reflection in Christian ritual succeed the sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

But the meaning of these last plays is not properly recog-

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph appears now to risk overstatement unless balanced by the remembrance that Shakespeare has as much in common with Aeschylus and Sophocles as he has with Dante (1947).

nized as yet. Indeed, while we stumble on the threshold steps of Shakespearian tragedy, we can scarcely approach those inner shrines, and until we do, we shall not further see the significance of *Henry VIII* for England today. Indeed, how can we? — we who find Shakespeare's kings a stumbling-block and the other spiritual kingship of the Christ an enigmatic dream, and are therefore unable to follow the intense significance of their union.

But we must never, in emphasizing Shakespeare's more universal significances, forget the intense and subtle human psychology and sympathy on which their value depends. The two co-exist in a dynamic and vital reciprocity. Conventional acceptance and recognition of the purposeful, ritualistic quality of art opens the universal, but not necessarily by denying the particular. Indeed, only in so far as we accept the necessary dramatic compression and telescoping of incident and psychology of the Shakespearian art-form can we focus the infinite minutiae of human sympathy, such as we have in this book explored in the person of Orsino, the essentially poetic psychology, that functions within and in terms of the dramatic art-form itself. The Shakespearian convention most subtly blends and balances the personal and the universal, which balance is closely related to his use of kings. For a worldly king is expressly this: the communal brought to a focal point in the personal, the state known as personality. The other king, the spiritual king, presents in his person not the communal only, but the universal: hence, the Christ. Indeed, the theological problem of the two natures, divine and earthly, each equally inhering to the full in the Christ, reflects the exact nature of the balance, the organic cohesion, of the two qualities, the highly universal and symbolic and realistically human, of the Shakespearian play. But through acceptance of the convention the apparent antinomy is at once resolved: more, its resolution is known to be the very reason and purpose of the drama. In other words, the drama exists to demonstrate the necessity of its own convention, which is its

ritualistic nature, for ritual and artistic convention are one, or almost one. Ritual is a deliberately willed acceptance in terms of which barriers between the universal and the personal, God and man, are broken. So in a Shakespearian production the conscious element of artistry must be apparent, you must know the play as a play and make a willed act of conventional acceptance, without which deliberate and consciously desired submission you cannot richly receive it. If conventional acceptances were not demanded by the play itself, we should have to invent others. They are the entrances to initiation. A certain active and partaking generosity is always necessary in order to receive generously and so the production must force its audience to share, consciously and willingly, in its own artistic creation. That is why our performances of Shakespeare will never be truly powerful till they are also consciously and sympathetically artistic, till they are given with reverence and dignity, with understanding, and intellectual humility.

If this were accomplished Shakespeare's work might do many strange things for us. It might awake in us an understanding of great art at once communal and intelligent, might help to solidify groups of our people of various classes and casts of mind in one common fusion of spiritual understanding, that is, understanding of the fundamental laws of life, be a bridge between the various complications of human existence and the central truths of Christianity, give us again, as a nation, a sense of national and Christian purpose — I am thinking especially of *Henry VIII* — revitalizing in us that which is behind Shakespeare's sublimation of kingship and faith in warrior-virtue, and helping us therefore either to cut out what new expressions may be necessary for the positive powers in man, or refurbish the old, and, finally, make possible a new contemporary drama of similar quality to Shakespeare's, which cannot exist till we understand, and know how to use, that which we already possess.

So I plead for a sensitive production of Shakespeare, something at least as deeply understanding as we give to an oratorio of Bach, something with the same reserve of dignity and with somewhat of the quality of military ceremonial. I stress the ritualistic element in Shakespeare but this final objectivity crowns usually some tumultuous subjective violence thrown up by the middle action, whose tempests and alarums should be as a crucible of sound to weld stage and auditorium in one living architecture. Then shall we listen afresh to the blood-pulse of human existence and its laws. And, as when you listen with a stethoscope you are appalled by the Atlantic rushing and seething and thundering in a human body, so Shakespeare awakes us not to realism, but to reality, not the face and limbs and sculptured body only, but the greater solidity, the rhythmic breathings of the spirit, the thunderous music, the domed and quivering palace.

## VI

### THE BODY HISTRIONIC (1940)

An introduction to the staging of *Timon of Athens*

THE production of Shakespearian plays eventually raises the important problem what precisely is, or should be, the proper place and use of the unclothed body in serious dramatic performances? Certain recent liftings of communal taboo necessarily react on stage practice. Tight clothes were recently used, and sometimes are still, to imitate nakedness, and though one meets instances of a bolder technique, these are usually far from satisfying. Here the ballet is in advance of the drama, while the films have probably done better than either, but the somewhat unnaturally stylized idiom of the ballet lends itself more easily to exotic costume design than to any profoundly significant use of physical detail, while examples in film production have normally been limited by triviality of theme. Neither art has, it would seem, understood and developed the finer potential significances, as have, for example, the arts of sculpture and photography. I here offer tentative suggestions from a new angle. My remarks are limited to consideration of the male form, since the female enjoys a fairly generally accepted definition in both moral reserve and exploitation of significant appeal, while its more directly sexual significances are, in our present era, clearly different in direction from those we are to analyse.

Throughout my note I shall, of course, assume that the obvious deficiencies – a better word might perhaps be ‘sanctities’ – are to be observed. Yet, even so, certain diffidences may arise. These should disappear under examination. I quote from a review in *The Times Literary Supplement* (December 24, 1938) of Mr Eric Gill’s introduction to his collection of engravings entitled *Twenty-Five Nudes*,



where a distinction is made of considerable importance

Much hangs on the difference, and it may be said that one reason for confidence in Mr. Gill as an artist is his firm grasp of the truth that in the complicated make up of human beings the spiritual and the sensual are less in conflict than are the spiritual and the coldly rational. It is the passionate mingling of soul and sense, not without humour, in these engravings of the nude that makes them little hymns of joy in creation.

Precisely such a 'passionate mingling of soul and sense' may find expression on the stage. Indeed, this union both conditions and is the farthest aim of all artistic endeavour. The creative consciousness of the painter transcends the sexual, which, as I am told by an experienced artist, vanishes under artistic pressure. It is the same in the theatre as Shelley says, artistic creation necessarily exists in and through a state 'at war with every base desire', where 'base' may, for our immediate purpose, be supposed to include the directly sexual without our pausing over its final propriety. The world of good and evil is, if only temporarily, transcended in both the artist and the artistic impact, and, indeed, appears somewhat childish in that context. As I have elsewhere phrased it, high art 'raises no desires it does not in the same instant satisfy'. It is therefore not merely moral, but, especially where strong sensuous impulses might seem most to be involved, the finest flower of morality. It is at once an inclusion, a transmutation, and a *katharsis*.

But stage technique remains indecisive and rudimentary. It is not enough for Edgar in *King Lear* to appear with only a waist-cloth and a level make-up: the peculiar part he plays will need a very subtle body-design and the waist-cloth must be significantly arranged. Nor can Ariel rely on a figure, however beautiful, with some characterizing accoutrements for waist, shoulders, and head, and nothing more but a straight application of body-wash or powder. Colours should be thought out and applied, with a delicate modulation suiting physical contours, to realize further the Ariel quality on and through the actor's body itself. We must not be aware of the actor as undressed, that is, of a

negation, and one which plunges us away from art into the wrong kind of reality. But even where undress is itself a primary theme, as in *Timon of Athens*, the result should not point us away from the world of dramatic art, but rather embed our consciousness even more deeply therein. The first necessity is a careful make-up. To what extent the body should be shaded, moulded, and accentuated must be left to individual experiment according to the conditions obtaining. The shading is easily overdone. Much can be accomplished by careful lighting from the wings, with shadows. I have seen a high-class ballet where a level body-wash made each actor's torso appear as a doughy lump, the natural shadows and therefore contours killed by strong footlights, leaving a shape without form, rondure, and life. For a performance of Caliban I have myself used an arrangement of heavy grey furs for waist, shoulders and back, arranged over a complete covering of green grease-paint with purple variations which, in its blend of the slimy-reptilian with the savagely human, is surely an improvement on the traditional tights, hump, and imitation skin, while aiming at an elemental dignity and rendering possible a significant body-action for which the usual costuming leaves no scope. Nakedness alone, however skilfully coloured, may not suit a conception that seems at first to demand it, and I doubt if Caliban, queer primitive as he is, would appear right without some heavy addition for the shoulders. For the Messenger in *Antony and Cleopatra* I have found a use of arm-bands, Egyptian collar, and head-dress help to supplement a loin-cloth and sash in building a stage personality. Whatever the precise amount worn, the final effect must have conviction: tights can never give this, missing entirely the sheen of life. Nor will a body-wash that does not react to lighting prove adequate. Grease-paint, or some similar and more tractable preparation, such as those made by Elizabeth Arden, will be necessary. We must through make-up as well as clothes and minor accoutrements, always give a definite impression of something care

fully created, not something removed. The body should not merely be exposed; it must be used. In this, even the best productions often appear to fail.

The words and thoughts of my present analysis probably appear more bold than would the corresponding creation on the stage, where one should not be directly aware of nakedness in isolation, owing to make-up, setting, lighting, and action. Any such figure must be felt to grow out of his setting. The normal need for atmospheric unity is here even more urgent. The middle scenes in *King Lear* must provide a wind-swept support to Edgar's uncouth yet vivid appearance. If Prospero's cell is designed with any sort of civilized, even though rustic, artistry, a naked Ariel will appear at once slightly indecent and too compellingly human for so elemental a conception. The impact of *Antony and Cleopatra* will depend throughout on atmospheric unity. Moreover, any striking bodily appearance, even of necessarily statuesque figures such as Nubian slaves, must be carried off by very assured acting. An amateurish indecision will be far more noticeable than in costume and risk an annihilating judgment, so will any too purely 'naturalistic' manner, any failure to use the limbs boldly with precision and effect, for naturalism, when at grips with nature itself, will paradoxically be found unnatural. The intellectual content of the performance must keep continually ahead, as it were, of the sensuous impact, and to do this the actor must sink his consciousness properly within his body, act through it, and transmit a sense of artistic poise and vitality. This lifts the audience's mind to the creative dimension, and it is probably because ballet is always on the move that undress has been there more freely developed. But in acting, where repose is continually also necessary, nothing but a sincere creative consciousness radiating through the total physique will enable every held gesture and posture to be, as they must be, vitally significant. The physical must be continually shot through with spiritual meaning, as well with Caliban as with Timon and Edgar. Finally, lighting may

legitimately be allowed to contribute more striking effects, akin to those used in modern photography, than is normally proper – according to my own principles – in Shakespearian production. Since the specifically human is visually broader there is the less fear of its dissolution under the electrician's art. Such lighting effects must, however, be carefully watched, lest they blur, rather than assist, the specifically physical creation.

All this might seem of secondary importance. But, if we look deeper, we find a relation to the basic substances of poetry. For poetic speech is used in drama to *body* forth in sensuous terms that inmost vitality normally smothered under the speechlessness of conventional propriety. Poetry reveals instincts and aspirations in their naked truth. Such a metaphorical analogy, involving a comparison, almost an identity, of the psychic and physical, is rooted firmly in our cultural tradition. The New Testament tells us that 'the body is more than clothes' in order to heighten our awareness of 'spirit' or 'life-breath', while St Paul uses continual body-images, whether in reference to Christ, the Christian community, or the resurrection of man. Shelley's work especially abounds in imagery of nakedness to denote 'soul' or 'spirit', sometimes with direct reference to the more inward and secret mysteries of poetic art. I quote from his *Defence of Poetry*:

Few poets of the highest class have chosen to exhibit the beauty of their conceptions in its naked truth and splendour, and it is doubtful whether the alloy of costume, habit, etc., be not necessary to temper this planetary music for mortal ears.

Again,

Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed.

My own poetic interpretations have all aimed to press further that very process at which Shelley hints and fall thus into direct line with my present argument. In Shelley's poetry, as in Nietzsche's Zarathustra, this image is used to correspond to intuitions of 'soul' or 'spirit'.

When he writes in the *Prometheus Unbound*

Child of light, thy limbs are burning  
Through the vest which seems to hide them

he refers to immortal essence blazing through a mortal frame, and Browning speaks in the same tradition when using such a phrase as 'immortal nakedness' in *The Ring and the Book* to characterize a paradisaical experience

We find in such pointers only especially vivid examples of the usual metaphorical process. Poetic impressions necessarily have dual implications (i) physical, and (ii) spiritual. These, however, are rather complementary than antithetic. 'Spirit' denotes the expressly vital, by derivation meaning 'breath', aiming at suggestion of ultimate power-sources, the living fluid, less weighty than blood, of existence, and literary study provides clear examples of the relation borne by a moving vitality to artistic strength in any human impressionism. A purely static intuition may approach decadence, the dangerously sensual, as in Spenser's ingeniously contrived Bower of Bliss according to the interpretation offered in Mr C. S. Lewis' *Allegory of Love*. Marlowe's Leander is somewhat similarly conceived, the youth's physique felt from the outside with a keen mental possessiveness, almost lasciviousness; however exquisite and delicate the aesthetic appreciation, the richest poetic fulfilment is not attained. But in Shakespeare's Adonis or Byron's Juan and Haidee, though description is highly, and far more warmly, sensuous, we are made aware of an inward flame, carried over by impressions of blood emotionally active through a physical transparency. So, too, with the child Juan rescued from the battle

A pure, transparent, pale, yet radiant face,  
Like to a lighted alabaster vase.

The physical form is as a lamp lit from within, the mysterious significance of life itself is felt in, through, and beyond the body, with a profoundly inward sensuousness creating what might be called a 'physical personality'. The deepest tragic and spiritual inclusiveness is, precisely, a

further extension of this physical-psychic-spiritual intuition, an intuition peculiarly vivid in the 'blood' and 'spirit' reiterations throughout *Julius Caesar*, while a consciousness suffering under a conviction of ultimate antagonisms will be debarred from the finest literary understanding and creation. Now there are interesting, though perhaps not generally suspected and certainly not as yet coherently reasoned, analogies in dramatic art. Earlier in this book I have written

The visual and spatial effects of production should primarily subserve the play's emotional quality and poetic colour. They will solidify the spiritual, make real that extra dimension of profound and richly solid significance that great poetry possesses. Thus the visual side of production will very largely be concerned with the play's more significant, universal, and poetic qualities.

Our main spatial and visual effect must, however, always remain the actor himself, and where figures of elemental and universal meaning are to be portrayed, a direct use of his body exploits the farthest visual resources of the actor's art. *Timon of Athens*, in this as in other ways, is found to express the central essence of tragic drama.

We have seen poetry as itself a revealing process, a removal of habitual silences, strictly analogous, one could suggest, to the spoken asides of O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. We have also seen how Shelley uses direct physical imagery to hint the subtler inward coherences underlying the surface statements of great poetry, as well as to denote spirit essences in general. Now this quality of poetic vision is exploited very clearly in Shakespeare's larger dramatic symbolisms: that is, the tearing away of some conventional covering becomes structural as well as verbal.

Often elsewhere I have discussed the peculiar symbolic exposures of Shakespeare's greater plays. *Hamlet* shows, as it were, a stripping away of accepted values, the hero's very nerves laid bare before the nakedly spectral appearance of his father's spirit and the tearing down of all deceptive covering from society around. In *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* exposure is rather metaphysical than psycho-

logical. In the one, state-order is rudely shattered to disclose the blood and fire of its own pulsing heart as ghostly civil strife burns and battles above Rome, in the other, the inward mechanisms of time and history are nakedly bared in the compressed and vitally significant drama of the three Apparitions<sup>1</sup> and the procession of future kings. In *King Lear* there is a revelation through madness and a break from conventional appearance into universal and elemental – what Nietzsche called Dionysian – significance, with a return through nature and wild sources of energy to fantastic exhibition of subterranean forces in the symphonic dialogue-extravaganza of Lear, the Fool, and Tom. All these visions concern some sudden stripping away of surface deceptions, leading eventually to expression through physical nakedness, both in Lear's attempt to tear off his clothes and in the dramatic conception of Edgar as 'poor Tom', whose 'presented nakedness', like his elaborated madness, far outreaches in formal suggestion the plot-logic that is its superficial motivation.

Next, this whole sequence curving up to *King Lear* is given an intensely human consummation and condensation in *Timon of Athens*. The play is itself a bare, almost indecently direct, statement of the experience present behind the more realistically motivated and subtly modulated surfaces of earlier works. Their essence is presented in naked simplicity. Moreover, at a moment of terrific dramatic pressure, the swift reverse movement of the titanic action, concerned as in former tragedies with a shattering of conventional appearance, pivots on Timon's suddenly throwing from him the trappings of civilization. The act should come as a sudden stab, an electrifying shock. Those visionary disclosures that have hitherto appeared as a complex interaction of many persons with heightening of attendant symbolism, all swirling round and through the tragic hero but not directly housed in him as a person, become now precisely incarnate

1 They symbolize (i) iron destruction, (ii) life born out of conflict and (iii) creation victorious. See my note on p. 148.

in the protagonist. In this sense, as in others, Timon is expressive of pure 'personality', with all the overtones of the infinite that the term suggests, as distinct from the earlier 'persons', more than one of whom in complex dance, together with heavy symbolic machinery, were needed to generate a super-personal presence. Timon himself is, now, just such a 'presence', and his play therefore dispenses with auxiliary symbolisms, no thunder or tempest of the usual Shakespearian sort accompanying the tragic redirection. He is himself utterly symbolic, in him the Apollonian and Dionysian principles coincide. He is at once single, whole, and universal, and his appearance during the later scenes, themselves set by the sea-shore, blends naturally into the many poetic impressions of the elemental, the cosmic, and the eternal. I wrote in *The Wheel of Fire* of Timon driven 'from ease and luxury to nakedness among the naked beasts and trees and planets of the night, and beyond these to the unbodied and immortal nakedness of death', and of 'the core of pure and naked significance, undistorted by any symbol, in the nothingness of death', while suggesting that 'at every stripping of the soul of Timon we have known that what was taken is but another rag, what remains, the essence, the reality', and that Timon at the last becomes 'pure essence of significance'. The artistic kinship of physical nakedness to spiritual profundity will always be close. Nor must we be deceived by Shakespeare's complete lack of Mallorvian fascination – as in *Hero and Leander* and *Edward II* – with his theme. He rather uses it, and stands alone among the world's dramatists in his peculiarly striking, profound and, indeed, metaphysical, impregnation. Moreover, he deliberately counters the visual attraction in both *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens* by associations of suffering and animal degradation. There is no verbal sensuous delight whatsoever but there should be a most impressive stage impact. Indeed, we here face merely one very important aspect of the usual process whereby in tragedy material disaster is countered by an inward and spiritual royalty.



Connotations both bestial and prophetic are in the two-way significances Caliban himself should have aesthetic dignity In *King Lear* a new rush of imaginative power takes the stage after the preliminary indecisions, and in *Timon of Athens* a new and striking direction is outlined by the protagonist's solitary, at once human and inhuman, grandeur during the final acts

Stage representation must be both strong and subtle The central act of Timon's disrobing can easily be rendered nugatory I have, for example, seen Timon, recently in rich robes, enter suddenly on a fore-stage under full lights with a single rough cloak, and throw it violently from him, to reveal a ready loin-cloth The action was crude, non-significant and unconvincing How did he come to be wearing that rough loin-cloth, or if so, why carry a cloak expressly to throw it off? No Let him be wearing under his rich clothes an elaborate kilt in similar style, and let him appear for this difficult action up-stage central, carefully lit from one side, with his original overcloak matching the kilt – the whole costume being here impossible – unwrapping and throwing it from him with deliberate, pictorial, yet natural movements fitted to the lines The action is held for a moment in mid-flight, a cameo Then let him reappear later in the rough loin-cloth of his prophetic savagery It is, you see, an important, semi-ritualistic, act, an unveiling of the universal, yet one to be carefully realized in terms of possible behaviour and set within a graduated sequence During the later action we must have a setting of wild and rugged power, with Timon first revealed as a statuesque silhouette among gaunt rocks, with the dawn gradually gilding, throwing up, creating, his body, preparatory to his first address to the sun Thereafter, various strong lighting and shadow effects, shot from the wings, can be used, both on his body and on the rocks Meanwhile the intermittent sound of surf will hint that ocean of being towards which the action moves <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> My own productions have been Hart House Theatre, Toronto, Feb–March, 1940, Leeds University (with the University Theatre

Though in Shakespeare actual examples of such elemental figures, while more frequent than in other dramatists, are strictly limited – we might add Oberon, and possibly Puck, to our list – they nevertheless present a challenge to our stage conventions. We are still far from the necessary understanding. Our freedom today from so-called Victorian taboos is perhaps not wholly a cause for satisfaction, since it may derive not so much from insight as from a dangerous insensibility where a deep concern would be more creditable. Blake, Nietzsche, Whitman, and Lawrence all attacked our want of a significant body-consciousness, and we need not search far for examples of body-desecration. These, though seeming innocent, are symptomatic. I mean, such things as the truly indecent flesh-coloured tights and vests still often used on the stage to hide and improve on the living texture of flesh, the irresponsible wearing of some noble Roman costume at a popular masquerade with no thought of the corresponding duty of make-up on arms and legs, or the vulgarity of obscene plaster masks with tumescent red noses for use in revelry. Surely few people sensitive to the human form can sit through some of our recent cinematograph cartoons with open eyes, those, I mean, where limbs are transposed or blasphemously pulled into absurd and nauseating proportions. A similar indictment can, and indeed must, be levelled against much that gains respect among the more esoteric advances in modern painting and sculpture, where artistic strength may yet be a reflection of a disease in the community. Such things offend against the closely-related natural and spiritual dignities of

Group), Dec. 1948, repeated for the N U S Arts Festival, Jan. 1949, and for the British Drama League, The Royal Hall, Harrogate, June, 1949, together with extracts from the later scenes in *This Sceptred Isle*, Westminster Theatre, London, July, 1941. See variously *New Theatre*, Feb., 1949, *The Stage*, 13 Jan., 1949, *Yorkshire Post*, 8 and 9 Dec., *Yorkshire Observer*, 8 Dec., 1948, *The Times*, 23 July, 1941, etc. Some particulars of the Leeds production are lodged in the Shakespeare Memorial Library, Birmingham. I hope eventually to publish an account of our version, which includes certain vital modifications.

man. But all this we accept, and in contradistinction are seriously ignorant where profounder values are in question.

Dress is symptomatic of the communal consciousness, and the limitation of human appearance to heads emerging from clothes reflects the excessively mentalized concentration of our era. For the head expresses human 'character' in the objective and individualizing sense. But the body beneath is less individualized, and may suggest equally the sub-mental and the super-mental states, whilst also emphasizing their close interdependence and continuity. As Nicolas Berdyaev has (in *Solitude and Society*) pointed out, the truly Christian culture will be centred rather in the heart than in the head. We are pointed to something more universal, less characterizing, less egocentric and ego-conscious, to the greater potential self as phrased by both Christ and St Paul in strong physical terms. The Crucifixion image offers an extreme example of this process, showing the human form on the edge, as it were, of some further, indefinable universalization. In doctrine and symbolism alike Christianity is over and over again felt to be the religion *par excellence* of the body – and so, with the greater boldness and precision, of the spirit too. In Christianity the body is an almost mystical entity, the 'temple', as St Paul calls it, of the spirit. The title of my present essay was suggested by that of Mr Frederick Carter's monograph *D. H. Lawrence and The Body Mystical*. The finest art may often derive from a similar recognition of physical significance, and, in the heart-area of the male form especially, of spiritual strength. I am, I admit, urging something new, something that has never hitherto been attempted. But there is no clear reason why the theatre should henceforth lag behind the sister arts of sculpture – of the traditional, Greek, kind, obeying the laws of nature – and photography. In it, bodily appearance and action can compass a whole gamut of new meanings from the man-beast kinship, as in Caliban and *The Emperor Jones*, to Ariel and Shelley's Prometheus, while Timon includes them all.

Such suggestions hint at what may prove a task of primary importance in the future history of the drama, and one which may well react sharply on dramatic composition, though not to be lightly undertaken, to be most carefully watched and given closest technical attention. Yet, again, any instinctive diffidence must also be closely examined. The average summer beach today dispels suspicion of fundamental aesthetic disapproval or moral hostility. Nor does the active movement of limbs or muscles on the stage itself constitute an added objection, since in swimming, boxing, and wrestling this is evident enough. Wherein, then, lies the difference? Precisely in what I have called 'significance', and, moreover, significance of a peculiarly subtle and powerful kind, beyond any such simple beauty of athletic energy as that of a diver's flight or a boxer's poise. Our reserve may, therefore, be not quite what we think it. Where undress is required a stage costume draped diagonally over one side of the body may often, on occasions where such is not strictly appropriate (since on the stage a very little will suffice to kill the body line and give a fully dressed impression), appear to be intended, somewhat illogically, to help render the other half respectable, with a consequent and, I think, semi-purposeful, destruction of the finer significance. For, if any diffidence concerned primarily with the stage and the additional effectiveness of artificial lighting exists, as, in my experience, it does, that diffidence will be found to derive less from any moral or aesthetic scruple than from a semi-conscious fear of what might prove a source of electrifying dramatic power, exerting less a sensual attraction than a spiritual domination. We are in danger of deploring the impotence of poetic, that is of spiritual, drama whilst fearing one medium through which the poetic essence might powerfully revitalize our stage. The visible breathing of a human body alone, closely entwined as it is with both the mystery and mastery of poetic speech, and, further, with the rhythmic essences of life itself, might, in certain dramatic contexts, hold compelling force

The possibility of giving adequate stage representation to Aeschylus' or Shelley's *Prometheus*, *Samson Agonistes*, the early books of *Paradise Lost*, or Byron's *Can*, depends on such recognitions. Our neglect of *Timon of Athens* is symptomatic. It is normally either not produced or so costumed as to constrict its power.<sup>1</sup> Wherever human drama touches the vast and elemental it will tend towards some such projection as you have in *Timon*. We might remember the vivid image of Laon's naked mountain exposure in brazen bonds against the burning sun in Shelley's poetic narrative *Laon and Cythna*. Such dynamic impressions pierce through the physical to the spiritual that is nevertheless indissolubly one with it, dramatizing through visible, yet pictorial, agony and destruction the living mystery of this interdependence. We have tragedy concentrated as light through a lens to the fiery centres of physical consciousness. Flecker's *Hassan* is powerfully constructed to drive home a similar statement through actual stage performance. The latter scenes of *Timon of Athens* aim to dramatize a slow, spiritual, crucifixion, the technique resembling the skilful use of a physical to express a psychological disclosure in O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, and, more distantly, the central incident of Massfield's *Everlasting Mercy*. By such works as *Timon of Athens*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *Laon and Cythna*, *Hassan*, *The Emperor Jones*, we are inevitably pointed to that archetypal imagination, at once act and image, which rises over them as an Everest above foothills the Crucifixion of the Christ. This, the central drama of our Western culture, may be felt as the fountain-source of all tragic art and creative action in the Christian era. For it dramatizes the final interpenetration of the human form by Significance, shows that Body 'given' for mankind in utter subjugation to an ultimate, if indefinable, purpose, and has therefore a faint reflection in even the humblest examples of the actor's art.

1 I should however record Mr Bridges Adams' Stratford production some years ago, with Mr Wilfrid Walter as Timon, where, costuming had the boldness, if not the deeper significances, demanded.

## VII

### THE PROFESSIONAL STAGE (1947)

#### I

IT is with some diffidence that I approach my subject. That my views on Shakespearian production are, in our society, heterodox, I well recognize, but it seems best to state, unequivocally, that my objection to much that passes current in our time remains deep-rooted. There is, of course, ample room for divergences of opinion on points of detail, but to certain basic Shakespearian realities our contemporary stage is, as I see it, blind. It is not that the workmanship is bad, on the contrary, one cannot but feel a deep respect for the technical efficiency shown in every department from leading actor to stage carpenter. But something – some soul-essence, some metaphysical centrality, some heart to the organism – is missing. Too often the production is all surface, all body, all pieces, like the animal in *Julius Caesar* in which they 'could not find a heart within the beast'. Sometimes a very little would be needed to turn a third-rate into a first-rate effect: let that actor hold his fine position a second longer, remove that one unfortunate setting, let that particular sound-effect be correctly timed and then allowed to ring out or reverberate as it should (instead of being done perfunctorily), why then, an improvement would be registered out of all proportion to the labour engaged. But it is not so. Our technical skill lacks guidance.

The implications go deep, it is no trivial matter. For what is it that is being suggested? The very thing against which the current artistic intelligence is set with consistent hostility. I am urging the build-up of the great, the grand in manner, the elemental, the universal, in short, and to avoid all misunderstanding, the romantic. Now we live in

an incorrigibly unromantic age, and it may therefore be argued that it is necessary to produce and act Shakespeare unromantically. That may, indeed, be so, certainly some of the performances applauded in our time suggest as much. But this one must say we are, by so doing, not performing the genuine Shakespeare. We are acting only so much as a modern audience can without trouble assimilate. Shakespeare accordingly entertains, up to a point, he is not allowed to dominate. He is caged, kept respectable, given a public-school education and made to preserve a typically English reserve. Our generation demands this. It is a pity. There are powers awaiting release which might do us good.

This is, however, no plea for the Elizabethan Shakespeare, the Shakespeare for whose understanding Granville-Barker so steadily laboured. Granville-Barker is held in deep respect by all Shakespearian workers. Before the 1914 war I saw his three exquisite productions at the Savoy Theatre of *The Winter's Tale*, *Twelfth Night*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But these three plays scarcely raised the problems with which we are here mainly concerned, the problems, say, of *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Indeed, Granville-Barker's literary studies themselves do not suggest that he would have met these satisfactorily, or rather, not exquisitely, while there was certainly something exquisite about those three Savoy productions. In them, with the help of Elizabethan airs and Rothenstein's designs, an intangible quality, a fragrance, an atmosphere, was realized that still, after many years, lingers in the memory. And yet, though preserving an Elizabethan simplicity and solidity, they were scarcely 'Elizabethan' in the archaeological sense: they were highly sophisticated re-creations in modern terms. Granville-Barker's literary studies, however, are products of our century in a different sense, they are valuable academic approaches, but lack the colour, body, flavour, the tang and smell, the atmospheric depth, the mysteries and the glamour, of theatric art, large areas of the subject are left untouched, stones remain while the

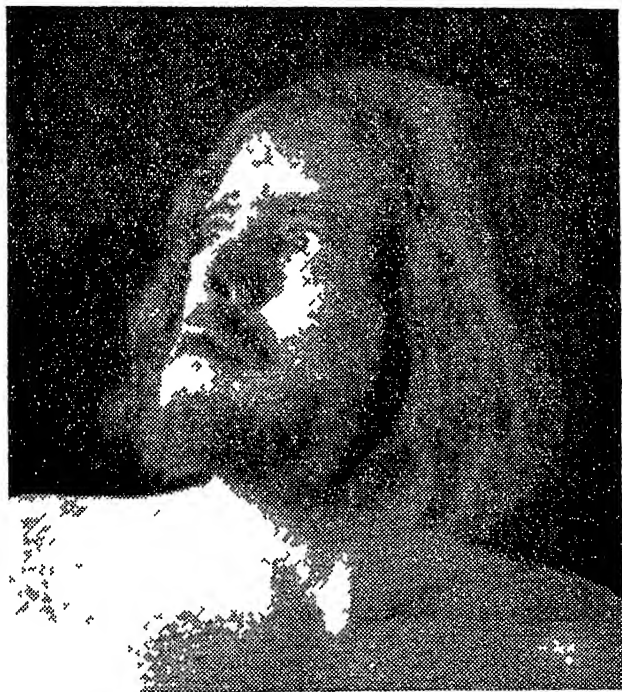


PHOTO C SAUERBREI

*Wilson Knight as Timon*



gold-dust falls through. These commentaries, for all their attention to the Elizabethan stage, grow from the soil of Bernard Shaw, Galsworthy, and Granville-Barker's own plays. Their prestige has been heightened by their speaking continually in terms of stage technique, and the uninitiated reader is likely to be impressed without asking himself whether the technique discussed properly covers the peculiar technique of Shakespearian drama, the technique needed for the poetry of the 'Crispin' speech in *Henry V*, for the Ghost in *Hamlet*, the Apparitions of *Macbeth*, the elemental grandeur of *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*, the sensuous splendour of *Antony and Cleopatra*, for the Vision of Jupiter in *Cymbeline*, the resurrection of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, the stately ritual of *Henry VIII*. My suggestion is, therefore, that Granville-Barker, though a playwright of talent and all but a producer of genius, was no final guide, either as commentator or producer, to the central mysteries of Shakespearian tragedy. It is possible, indeed, that his early retirement from the stage was caused in part by some such, semi-conscious, recognition. He was too fine an artist to be content with a provisional success.<sup>1</sup>

Where Shakespearian tragedy at least is concerned, it will be seen that I am, like Iago, 'nothing if not critical'. It is, however, no single actor, nor producer, nor any individual

1 Since making these comments I have read Mr Bernard Shaw's recent assessment of Granville Barker's achievements as producer (in *Drama*, Winter 1946), which contains the following: 'Barker's productions of his own plays and Galsworthy's were exquisite: their styles were perfectly sympathetic, whereas his style and taste were as different from mine as Debussy's from Verdi's. With Shakespeare and with me he was not always at his happiest and best, but he was absolutely faithful to the play and would not cut a line to please himself, and the plays pulled him through with the bits that suited him: enchanting and the scenery and dressing perfect. His only other fault was to suppress his actors when they pulled out all their stops and declaimed as Shakespeare should be declaimed. They either underacted, or were afraid to act at all lest they should be accused of ranting or being "hammy".' (The refusal to cut is, or at least can be, a sign not of strength but of weakness in a producer: see page 36)

production against which my present arguments are intended, but rather against our contemporary standards in general. For my purpose, however, I must be allowed to refer to some actual productions, the points cannot otherwise be made with precision. I accordingly first ask the reader to consider my views on a first-class London production. Sir Laurence Olivier's *King Lear* with the Old Vic Theatre Company. The production has been well received and Sir Laurence's own performance ranked as among the foremost of our time. For myself, I was deeply interested, certain parts held for me a lucid and poignant beauty, the evening was a genuine success. I can therefore with the less reserve use this central production as a nucleus to the development of certain thoughts that appear of value, my choice of it for primary notice is the measure of my respect for the actor and the company concerned, though in the process I may be allowed to hunt, with all possible sympathy and in full understanding of the great tests met nightly by the professional actor, certain ways in which my own views diverge from those expressed at the New Theatre.

## 2

The conception of *King Lear*'s first scene was original. One is brought up to expect, and usually one gets, a fierce, intolerant old man striding to his central position and casting a fiery eye on his subject family and lords. Here we had something very different. The throne was up-stage, centre. The stage centre itself was occupied by some six attendants bowing first right at Goneril's, then left at Regan's, entry. The main persons were grouped at the sides. Lear himself entered from one side, quite informally, and passed up, threading his way among the attendants. Arrived at his throne, he was partly masked, his stage centrality and dignity discounted. He struck one from the start as a slightlyussy, almost roguish and very lovable, if at times an irritating, old man. He whispered to Cordelia on his way, as though enjoying a private joke with her. This reading was

maintained. The renunciation of his love for Cordelia was comparatively light in carriage, his 'on thy allegiance' to Kent lacked both ferocity and finality. Lear was shown as a wilful, almost naughty, old man, but not, even momentarily, as sinning. All was done with a delicacy of touch that was, after its fashion, satisfying. But only with reservations.

For is this a possible reading? Does it follow the curves of the dramatic rhythm? More: does it grow organically from the play's heart? Consider: if Lear and Cordelia enjoy a private whisper here, surely that implies a mutual understanding and confidence that makes her later repudiation peculiarly cruel, whereas if one regards her as having been kept at a distance by a dominating and rather tyrannic, though greedily loving, father, then her sulkiness falls into place. Moreover, can we possibly associate with this reading such lines as these

For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,  
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,  
By all the operations of the orbs  
By whom we do exist and cease to be,  
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,  
Propinquity and property of blood,  
And as a stranger to my heart and me  
Hold thee from this for ever! I he barbarous Scythian  
Or he that makes his generation messes  
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom  
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied and relieved  
As thou, my one time daughter

and

Peace, Kent!

Come not between the dragon and his wrath!

The lines demand to be mouthed. Their ferocity is of a peculiar and recognizable Shakespearian type. Tyrannic fathers are usual in Shakespeare and when thwarted imprecate hideous doom on their children: it happens with Capulet, Egeus, York (in *Richard II*). Their unnecessarily harsh and bombastic manner recalls the outburst of Isabella against Claudio. At such moments we are aware of some repressed guilt stung to a sudden fury, as when Léontes

is confronted by Paulina holding his child Lear's early passages are barbed by a similar irrational fury They witness psychic energies not properly geared to his conscious mind They *are* indeed precisely the substance of his later madness A whimsical Lear cannot grow into the Lear of the Storm scenes, the stuff is not there I conclude that the traditional reading is correct and necessary, that something of the stagey old actor – why does every age talk of that undying type – is it possible we merely mean the experienced actor? – is required to make sense of this stormy opening

The later action suffered in consequence Had the opening been given with more gravity and fury, then the central performance would have been, in the main, admirable But it could not properly register after this questionable start It was as a pillar with no foundation

So much necessarily depends on the gradual reduction of Lear's false dignity and the final enthroning, by the way of madness and humility, of a more spiritualized royalty The shock and pathos of his gradual breaking lose greatly if he be not first shown as an almost repellent tyrant Certainly he must have some obvious dignity to be broken If he be too lovable at the start, he ceases to be tragic later, not because the correction of a fault is at stake, but because tragedy depends on depth, or weight The light, humorous reading was dangerous on yet another count Lear is essentially humourless It is because the Fool dimly realizes that if Lear could be brought to laugh at himself his sanity might be preserved that he so remorselessly concentrates his own witticisms on the crucial issue Twice, indeed, Lear becomes, unknowingly, directly comic, as when he caps his own violences with 'But I'll not chide thee' and 'No, I will be the pattern of all patience, I will say nothing' These were given boldly, if subtly, as comedy, raising once a perfectly legitimate laugh But Lear is comic only because he has no humour in him where his own behaviour is concerned He can scarcely therefore be a whimsical type ¶This dangerous reading caused one of Lear's neatest

later scenes to suffer I mean his entry in full madness decorated with flowers This can be done – normally I should say it should be done – as a scene of greatness in pathetic ruin Here it was taken as essentially lyrical, pretty, lovably so, not unlike Ophelia's madness

Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,  
She turns to favour and to prettiness

The reading is risky, but consistent with the text, and one which renders the risks Shakespeare has forced the less dangerous, for here the 'mouse' and 'toasted cheese' passage and the cruelly difficult running exit grew naturally from the conception Lear was a child again Had this been grafted on to, or rather flowered from, a performance starting with something of a despotic grandeur, it would indeed have been exquisite, of an extreme, if delicate, poignancy, darting light into the gloomiest caverns of mental agony As it was – one must return to the complaint, if only because certain tiny ticks of expression kept reminding one that this was the same whimsical figure of the opening – Lear had already shown a Puckish humour, there had been in him more than a trace of Justice Shallow, he was already a lovable, child-like, figure The contrast – and Shakespeare works continually by such contrasts – was gone

The play's heart is the Storm scene, or scenes These provide a complex of fascinating problems and the New Theatre production raises them in a peculiarly interesting fashion Here, if anywhere, the critic of romantic and metaphysical leanings is likely to have reason for attack, here, if anywhere, I found myself all but whole-hearted in admiration

Normally such imaginative set-pieces as Lear's two opening declamations demand some static formality, imprinting, if only for a moment or two, the temporal with eternal status But here the first words were spoken in complete darkness, then the lights came up sufficiently to show Lear and his two companions separated, or at least separating, Lear walking apart, alone, across, and down The heath was

suggested by a ground-roll upstage and lightning intermittently thrown on the cyclorama in fiery zig-zags. The main lighting also was used intermittently, the stage being dark and illuminated by turns words were spoken under both conditions. The general result was not, however, chaotic. By careful orchestration, Lear's walk took him down-stage to catch a sudden beam for an important piece of declamation, then he was moving again, in darkness. Sometimes all three figures were close together under a level lighting. There were accordingly at least four sorts of light-effect: (i) complete darkness, (ii) zig-zags, (iii) Lear picked out alone, (iv) reasonably full lighting showing all three actors. These effects – there may have been others, such as silhouettes against a half-lit cyclorama – were interwoven with continual movement. The persons were felt as coming together and parting, they were, very clearly, wandering about a tempest-riven heath. Sound-effects were adequate and not allowed to smother the words. This is purely a matter of timing and to talk of an actor as 'dominating' the thunder is therefore meaningless. No actor has ever existed whose voice could register through a really effective thunder-clap. Though Granville-Barker is right in asking the actors to act the tempest themselves, he is wrong in simultaneously discounting the dramatic power of sounds. No. Let the two effects of voice and thunder intershade. In this the opening of the Olivier tempest-scene succeeded. The orchestration of voice, sounds, lights, and stage movement was most efficient.

The general method was risky. It was fundamentally realistic rather than symbolic, except in so far as an artistic realism in such a scene inevitably becomes symbolic. One was less aware of man elevated to an elemental challenge than of distraught wanderers having poetry drawn out of them by fits and starts. The play on darkness, the picking out of separate figures, the sharp intermittency in place of gradation – all are, normally, dangerous in Shakespeare. Yet here, at this moment – for we are still considering Lear's

first two speeches – of this drama, and with this actor, they succeeded

I say 'with this actor' for an especial reason. I have seen Laurence Olivier in a number of films his Heathcliff especially appealed to me. In Shakespeare, I have seen only his Coriolanus, Justice Shallow, and his film *Henry V*. Of his film work, both as actor and as director, no one will do anything but speak in the highest terms. It is a notable record. Of his verse-speaking there is a possible criticism. I observe a tendency to rely on sudden changes of voice, to speak some lines quietly, colloquially, and then, without warning, two, three, or four – not many as a rule – with full rhetorical force. The result is a shout, since without gradation relevance and significance are lost. The two terms of the Shakespearian poetry, the realistic and the rhetorical, are clearly present, what is strange is their discontinuous, ungraded, intermittency. Now this characteristic, which appears to be part of a deliberately considered technique, was less noticeable in *King Lear*, but it was not absent. The part, however, lends itself to this technique, jerking from colloquial triviality to poetic grandeur, or *vice versa*. Examples of an almost humorous effect have been noticed. He talks quietly to Regan, attempting gentleness, and then breaks out 'Who set my man i' the stocks?' These intermittences throughout Lear's long preliminary torment are vital and the treatment was correspondingly successful. Even more interesting is the Storm scene itself. Clearly, the arrangement as hitherto described, the sharp alternations of light synchronized with chosen positions, exactly lend themselves to the technique in question. A few muttered words in darkness, a sudden beam catching Lear in a new position, his hand lifted and a line or two of declamation to the heavens, then moving to a huddled group and colloquial speech – it was a remarkable piece of co-ordination.

A word of praise as to colour. The effect of dim, greyish, wind-swept heath, the low roll of ground, the silver of Lear's beard and hair, the blue and white of his robes, the

cyclorama studded by shots of golden lightning, make a memorable picture True, the result was, perhaps, rather pleasing than awe-inspiring, lyric rather than tragic Often one longed for a position to be held, in order to allow its beauty to impress itself, to take form in a dimension of symbolism never entered But the pleasure – yes, it was pleasure – was so keen that complaints are pointless a moving study in which the senses were momentarily integrated in a super-sensuous whole

All this in spite of its contradicting certain of my own principles But – and this is all that matters – it does not necessarily contradict Shakespeare's peculiar technique in this particular scene

Clearly, one cannot expect more than a few moments of such success, and should, indeed, be grateful for any, especially at such a central moment in great drama as this The tension – but that is too strong a word – the harmony was not maintained after the arrival of mad Tom, and this for no fault of Tom's The production was at fault

The part played by Edgar in the tempest is central, not ancillary His appearance has been elaborately described, he has long and most fantastic speeches All this should be given a bold presentment Here we were confronted by a healthy, robust figure with various rags draped about him, shoulders and all This gets no effect of 'presented nakedness', it does not realize the 'forked' animal Lear talks of Quite a little on the stage suffices to render a person fully dressed it is a matter of line a few rags in the wrong place kill the body-line and the effect of nakedness goes Edgar should wear as little as possible, but that little carefully draped and the body made up – as is seldom done – with care The actor should be cast for these central scenes He should be of ballet build, agile, and lithe, able to act with all his limbs as he pounces after his imaginary devils With his arms up-flung in fantastic gesture he is a veritable Flibbertigibbet, a dancing light, a demon, the genius of the storm-riven heath, indeed, a forecast of Ariel as described by him-



self 'flaming amazement' above the tempest-racked ship. This is the true Edgar. He, like Ariel, is poetry incarnate, a directing poetic and dramatic force, fulfilling throughout as madman, choric commentator, and agent of judgment a peculiarly poetic role. Instead, we had merely a robust young actor, sitting still, stolid, in his heavy rags, mumbling gibberish (muffled by thunder) which no one listened to, they were given as speeches no one *need* listen to, there was no attempt to act them. Necessarily, the subtlety by which Lear is gradually attracted to this demon of madness ('my philosopher') away from the Fool did not well appear, though the Fool certainly had a lonely exit that helped. The farmhouse was poorly devised - a troublesome hut demanding a particular belief unlike anything else in the production and failing to support the fantasia for which it was the setting. Such failings our professional theatre can and should put right.

A word on the settings. The play opened in an interior shading off, above an arch, to a view of many old-style houses, courtyards, turrets, seen semi-bird's-eye fashion. The scenery, though not unpleasing, appeared flat and rather trivial and certainly did nothing to support the poet's, or the actor's, art. For the rest of the middle action, except for the open heath scene, a house-side was used at alternate wings for Albany's and Gloucester's households. For the conclusion we returned to the first setting, or something similar. There was an effect of (i) an interior, and (ii) a light, airy, panorama of imaginary houses. Herein the battle-scenes lacked realism, one could not possibly believe that hostile parties were entering one after the other into a room just vacated by their opponents. Moreover, the flimsy show of pictured buildings was ineffective as a visual accompaniment to the horns of judgment and tragic conclusion. The bright lighting offered no atmospheric help. Here Sir Laurence's acting was horribly hampered by its impossible context - far better to have used the open heath set only and left the rest to the poet and the actor. Let the gaunt beauty

of the close speak from a setting as cold and elemental as itself

My criticisms must not be supposed typical of London's response. The production was, and in part rightly, hailed. The central performance was accorded the highest praise. My criticism, if of value, is, indeed, less a criticism of a single production than a criticism of our contemporary standards, a criticism of criticism itself. Thus James Agate, after justly criticizing the recent *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Piccadilly Theatre for failure to reflect properly the Shakespearian statement, remarks 'How then comes it that an evening in which everything is set for ghastly failure turns out to be gigantic success?' His own answer is 'a pair of magnificent' (though he admits them to be miscast) 'actors'. It is time we ceased to be so readily content. The complicated setting of this sumptuous but laboured production resembled rather an unfinished factory than a resplendent Egypt, while its last movement, funereal instead of triumphant, shattered the meaning. Here is an extract from Mr Harold Hobson's notice of the Olivier *King Lear*:

When the king himself appears, white haired, white bearded, yet swift and eager and active, we recognize him at once for what he is, a humorist, a man of infinite fecundity of wit, choleric maybe, but resilient and alert, ready in sheer intellectual energy and physical well-being for any jest or experimental escapade, whether it be sallying forth at midnight with the Doctor, or for dividing his inheritance according to the whim of a girl's rhetoric.

Before he speaks, he stops to gossip with Cordelia, he eyes one of his soldiers quizzically from top to toe and back again, he is bursting with an overflow of vital forces from his brain at any moment may spring some plan, some scheme, half joke, half earnest, which, born on the inspiration of a moment, may, in sudden change of mood, have consequences to wreck kingdoms and ruin lives.

Precisely. The difference is that I maintain this to be an untenable reading. More, that the very nature of this reading precludes great acting, while remaining symptomatic of a twentieth-century limitation, for it rules out, from the start, that spiritual intensity, that sense of powers within

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and beyond man, numinous, Dionysian – call them what  
you will – whose projection is the one condition, in drama,  
of what mankind considers great

3

I HAVE chosen the Old Vic *King Lear* for examination partly because its memory is fresh and partly since Sir Laurence's reputation on both sides of the Atlantic is so assured that no remarks of mine are likely to embarrass, even for a moment, his work. My complaints are general, not particular, and a few other recent examples may therefore with relevance be noticed.

It is always, you see, basically the same complaint. Mr John Gielgud's Hamlet, which I saw in Toronto before the war, was a performance of brilliant intensity where colloquial dialogue was concerned. His verbal duelling with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern was superb, but he was – to me – less happy in the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy, given to a nervous, rapid, striding movement instead of as a deep, weighty adventure, from a still posture, or with the graveyard meditations carried as light conversation, or with the Ghost scenes, given in a darkness hostile to the actor's art, or with the falsifying conclusion, the dead by various tricks removed to leave Hamlet with Horatio on an empty stage. Mr Gielgud is expert at conveying nervous intensity in a modern part, but the grander moments, the vast rhythms, he has not, so far, offered us.<sup>1</sup> His finest piece of Shakespearian acting was (in my experience) his Shylock, which he was forced to attack as a 'character' part, subduing certain mannered tendencies that detract from his more poetic studies. His *Lear*, which I saw in 1931, appeared to me to lack vocal characterization, though possessing considerable force. I have a record of Mr Gielgud's speaking of John of Gaunt's lines on England. The delivery is beautiful, but the conception static and the quavering accents of age,

<sup>1</sup> I write from a limited experience. I regret having been unable to see Gielgud's recent *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* or Olivier's *Richard III*.

which alone justify the repetitions, the involved and drawn-out syntax, the struggle, as of a dying man, for his climax, were not attempted. The speech should surely *accumulate* energy, growing with victorious effort from a death-bed struggle therein only is its structural and dramatic meaning, its conjuring up, through close poetic characterization, of a mysterious power, its soul. It is again, you see, an indefinable essence, a presence behind, or thrown up by, the lines or events of Shakespearian drama that I am trying to indicate and to which it seems that our generation, through its leading exponents, is insensitive, though it is true that a national record, made for a specific purpose, is no fair test. Mr Gielgud, fine actor though he be with an electric, nervous contact and a distinguished delivery, remains, in my opinion, at his best in high comedy, such as *Bairie*, *Wilde*, *Tchekhov*, and *Congreve*, or twentieth-century plays of an intense type, such as *Musical Chairs*, *Richard of Bordeaux*, and *Crime and Punishment*.

Mr Gielgud is more than an actor of intellect and appeal. He has for years been the presiding genius of our London stage. This position he has held with a striking artistic integrity and unselfishness, even though its effect on his personal, rather too individualistic, technique is on occasion dangerous. He has a long series of valuable productions to his credit and deserves especial honour for his boldness in bringing to the West End so dubiously entertaining a classic as *The Duchess of Malfi*. Here, however, a criticism must again be recorded. Mr George Rylands' production held much beauty and some power, but it failed where one today expects failure. The symbolic occasions, the internal organs, of the drama, did not – at least at the performance I witnessed – receive the projection they need. First, the dance of madmen came across as a chaotic, disharmonious, non-signifying piece of realism. There is, maybe, some authority for this in the text, where their words are concerned. But can nothing more be done with this and the accompanying incidents? Cannot these queer,

decadent, moments of harmonious horror, the dance and the bellman's chant – Webster's analogue to Shakespeare's *opposition* of storms and music – be helped out with a more studied technique? A similar weakness characterized the echo, that outstanding instance of aural atmospherics, which came across as, indeed, a real echo would have come across that is, as a faint replica, all but synchronized with the original words, so that barely a syllable overlapped. The effect was light, rapid, instantaneous whereas we should be aware of something weighty, sepulchral, ominous, in such phrases as 'deadly accent', 'a thing of sorrow', 'thou art a dead thing', 'never see her more'. The nature of these, the only noticeable defects – except for the Duchess' rather perfunctory death – in an excellent production, remains significant.

Some of the most promising work of our time is being done by Mr Donald Wolfit. The provinces are deeply indebted to his indefatigable labours, his company has now a worldwide record, East and West, and one remembers his lunch-hour Shakespeare in blitzed London when theatre-land was dead. Omitting comedy, I have seen, so far, his Ulysses and Iachimo, done at Stratford, and, in 1946, his own productions of *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Volpone*. The productions themselves are simple, honest, and neat, with no nonsense about them, and that, in the contemporary Shakespearian theatre, is saying a lot. Often today one is expected to accept wide changes in scene before a background whose laborious detail prevents utterly any such acceptances, a fault very obvious in the Piccadilly *Antony and Cleopatra*. Here there was no such embarrassment. The semi-permanent setting in *Hamlet* was sensibly devised and did not let one down – as so often happens – in the Graveyard scene, where some well-placed cypresses toned in well. A not dissimilar setting for *Othello* was adequate, though lacking in colour and grandeur. Frederick Valk's Othello showed a massive power alternating with a telling realism. The whole, however, was certainly a study in mental breakdown rather

than poetic tragedy, except for certain moments towards the end. The volcanic bursts, the alternation of quiet and fury, were inappropriate to Othello's flow and swell of passion. Mr Valk had, however, a great delivery in his fourth-act speech 'Had it pleased Heaven' and his final scene had grand moments. One was pleased to find an actor of such power and breadth, even though the power on occasion lacked control.

Mr Wolfit's Iago, like his Iachimo, was very satisfying, but his Hamlet was, comparatively, weak. His personality scarcely suits the part — it is personality, not face or figure, that matters — at least, according to the conventional reading. Never in recent years have I heard Hamlet's lines spoken with so consistent a truth to Shakespeare, but the performance failed to hold together as a unit. One was tempted to think—wrongly, as his Solness proves — that his abilities are not suited to an introverted type. Certainly where powerful acting was needed, as in the Ghost scenes, Hamlet's interview with the King before leaving for England, and the soliloquy after meeting Fortinbras' army, he was thoroughly at home. His graveyard meditations had, vocally, the required depth and weight. His use of a long black and purple cloak was effective, but when he appeared in a short Elizabethan cape, a costume with no lines of dignity, his impact was gone, while his less intense scenes lacked assurance. I feel that his interpretation may have been at fault, and that, though not an ideal Hamlet, yet by playing less for sympathy and more to give the inwardness, as well as the ghost-ridden agony, the macabre threat, of the part, he might have left us with a striking performance.

Nevertheless, Mr Wolfit's work at times approaches the standard for which I plead. Though his productions at present do not always reflect the curves of the Shakespearean structure as surely as his own speaking follows those of a single speech, yet they do not actually contradict those curves, they do not offend. He himself has grandeur and

grace of movement, and a vocal range which is remarkable. Though he possesses a fine sense of the theatre, his speaking is never just stage speaking. Every phrase is given variously and interpretatively, we are not returned continually to the same well-known, favourite, emotional timbre of voice or gesture. His mastery of the long speech – a more difficult art than is usually supposed, involving a projection not merely of its sequences but also of its architectural unity, its structure – was especially vivid in *Volpone*. The wooing scene, with Miss Iden Payne as Celia, was outstanding. Faultless speaking, the blend of static position with significant movement, interpretative business (e.g. the mesmerizing effect and the lady's fascinated impotence) in a setting of dignity, simplicity, and rich yet simple colour – all contributed superbly to the gathering, growing, unfurling structure of dramatic poetry.

On his return to Leeds in 1947 I saw Mr Wolfitt's *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, and – though I am not now concerned with 'comedy' – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the last a graceful production, though as Bottom Mr Wolfitt perhaps enjoyed himself 'not wisely but too well'.

His *Richard III* was both arresting and entertaining, though in the earlier scenes the part was, to my mind, given a too-comic interpretation. The neurotic bitterness defined in Richard's opening soliloquy might have been allowed to counter from the start the almost Jonsonian burlesque in which Shakespeare certainly here also indulges. Thus the general treatment struck me as too light and off-hand, not weighty enough, until the Coronation scene, when the necessary change – and how delightful to find this gathering power of the Shakespearean protagonist emphasized – was nevertheless too abrupt. We were faced by almost a different person. There was a sudden unleashing of demonic force, underlined by Richard's heavy red robe and the throne's red drapery into which he sank as into a bed of fire. The scene flamed, for five minutes (this being one of the most highly charged incidents in Shakespeare) we were con-

fronted by remarkable acting Mr Wolfit's favourite trick of infusing dramatic point into his cloak – an art he has probably developed further than any previous actor – was finely in evidence. At the dismissal of Buckingham, Richard's robe was for an instant a live thing, whipping out as a tongue of flame. I could wish that the earlier scenes had done more to prepare for this, but from now onwards the tension of the acting was never relaxed. I say 'of the acting' since I was less pleased with the production. In bringing the opposing generals' tents on to the stage the Elizabethan dramatist is, it is true, being thoroughly naughty in a peculiarly annoying fashion. What can be done? In my own experience it seems best to concentrate on Richard's tent and let the ghosts speak into the wings in addressing Richmond. Mr Wolfit elected boldly to use the two tents. They were dangerously realistic – a mistake his productions normally avoid – and, what was yet more dangerous, were directly and equally related to a single back-cloth of greenery and woods which forced a sense of exact locality. Conventional acceptance was accordingly hampered, though had the tents been indicated by plain draperies and set at stage corners rather than central, and with no such realistic background, acceptance would have been far easier. The ghost-speeches, done in procession rather than by solid grouping and gesture, lacked weight and power. Throughout the play the choruses of lamenting women might with advantage have been given a more formal and statuesque grouping and a more declamatory manner. Observe again the nature of my demands, involving (1) formal (though never unnatural) artistry as a means to (ii) projection of the super-realistic.

Mr Wolfit's acting in *Macbeth* was memorable. His speaking was, to my ear, a trifle slow, but excellent in pointing and luxuriant in vocal colour. His bearing was charged at each instant with visual, almost sculptural, significance. His stage action in movement, poise, and gesture in approach to the Ghost in the Banquet scene was artistry



of the highest order. His vocal range and control was, as usual, remarkable, sometimes (as at the second appearance of the Ghost in this scene) on the brink of tears without loss of poetic resonance, and sometimes dragging the last ounce of power from the well-like depths of a single word.

The interpretation, however, of the final scenes diverged strongly from my own. I see Macbeth here on a pinnacle of experience, radiating lines of force, whereas Mr Wolfit followed the more usual, common-sense reading, giving us a broken man, drained of strength. Hence those few supreme poetic passages of the close were spoken as wistful, pathetic, nostalgic, rather than as expressions of a proud spirituality beyond good and evil. I grant that such an interpretation is usual, though my own could, I think, be defended in terms of criminology, it has poetry, if not ethics and common-sense, on its side. Though Mr Wolfit can revel in portrayal of a straight Jonsonian or Shakespearian villain, he here elected to avoid this peculiar, Nietzschean, territory. He certainly has for it, as an actor, the perfect equipment, and his performance at this point appeared as a deliberate curtailment of his natural powers. He wore no cloak: perhaps he felt that it was not ethically safe to do so!

The production as a whole was sound and sensible. The acting was throughout virile, and the speaking had clarity and vigour. The simple yet rich and weighty settings were telling. As for the supernatural element, it did not annoy but neither was it good. One was glad to get it over. The Weird Women were chattering hags, not elemental forces, the Apparitions and procession of Ghosts were barely adequate. Again, I assert uncompromisingly that there is a technique for making such scenes not merely register but transfix.

Next, as to *King Lear*. The long opening action held extraordinary power. Mr Wolfit's exceptional vocal control — he uses a different voice for every part — was strikingly apparent. He played Lear as a carefully composed character

study without any loss – indeed a gain – of poetic force every accent, every petulant or agonized gesture was an old man's. Yet this Lear was also a figure inspiring fear. There was evil in him. The demonic pleasure with which he suddenly concluded his long curse on Goneril, as though something had been actually accomplished, was magical, Druidical, hideous with an old age, hag-like, malice. His use of the whip (a fine exploitation of the text) in action with Oswald and the Fool was masterly, and yet I have never seen a Lear whose affection for the Fool (excellently played by Mr Frederick Peasley) was so poignantly given. Indeed, these grim touches were the necessary contrast to those passages where our sympathies were wrung by Lear's more lovable qualities. Especially fine were certain striking moments of uncanny vocal modulation, where Lear fears approaching madness. His short scene alone with the Fool was almost unbearable in pathos. With all this, Lear was, from first to last, 'every inch a King'. One understood Kent's recognition of his authority. One could feel, as the poet means us to feel, that the great earth itself must tremble at his shaking. In all my mature experience I have not been so forced to forget all knowledge of Shakespeare and the theatre and live the action being performed. If this was not great acting, then I do not know where it can be found.

From the Storm scene onwards the tension was, however, relaxed. For this there are many possible reasons. One's attention perhaps tired after the long and so poignantly realized opening (about half the play). Moreover actual madness, if convincingly played, is, by itself and without extraneous support, scarcely a theme proper to stage representation. Again, no one can pretend that all the play's action (the loves of Goneril and Regan, the killing of Oswald, Edgar's challenge) is dramatically strong. All these are possible reasons, but the production itself cannot be exonerated. The second half of *King Lear* is, indeed, a most crucial test.

After Lear's exit into the storm a change of approach is needed. Unless we are plunged into a *new kind* of action, a new artistic dimension, as it were, we not only miss some of Shakespeare's meaning, but, what is perhaps worse, these other contributory elements of weakness come instantaneously into play. Much hinges on Lear's two addresses to the storm. These were given down-stage with a frontal speech-position beneath a vertical spot, and with a single tree-trunk or monolith directly behind. Lear was accompanied by the Fool alone. My own preference is an up-stage central and raised position, caught by wing-lighting mainly from one side, with both the Fool and Kent standing or crouching to solidify the group, all set among gigantic masses of rock, so that Lear can tower as he should. The actor can, for these two speeches, drop his vocal characterization, if, and only if, the setting is right. Mr Wolfit's speaking seemed, for this once only, to step out of character with a simple rhetorical fling, and in this setting (since the single monolith was quite non-significant) the result was weak, nor did he elect to use one of the weightier of his many stage voices. For the rest, his total performance was, in the manner of the opening, a remarkable study, his prayer 'Poor naked wretches' and his sermon 'When we are born' were faultless. But something had gone. The surrounding atmosphere, so important from the Storm scenes on, lent no support, it lacked depth, mystery, unity. The fantastic accompaniment to Lear's madness was missing, and actual madness, without such an accompaniment, lacks dramatic relevance. The part of Edgar as mad Tom was badly undeveloped. The settings, though weighty and simple, missed the elemental. Something must be done to give visual expression to the Wagnerian quality of the Storm scenes and the gaunt menace of the rest. Without it, the action sags. So a noble performance drooped, standing, except for Rosalind Idon's vivid Cordelia, alone.

To sum up my impressions in the Coronation scene in

*Richard III*, the Banquet scene in *Macbeth*, and the whole first movement of *King Lear*, Mr Wolfit's acting, I freely admit, touched the quality I am trying throughout this essay to define, and he is helped by Miss Rosalind Idon, whose exquisite mastery of Shakespearian rhythm in speech and gesture – her Titania was a joy – matches so admirably his own peculiar gifts. Mr Wolfit's company is now stronger, but, even so, his own broad artistry tends, naturally, to stand out. With a Shakespearian protagonist this does not necessarily matter. What does matter is that the productions themselves (that is, grouping, lighting, settings, etc.), though avoiding many faults (especially the faults of realism and flimsiness in scenic effect) make slight positive contribution to the whole and are accordingly dwarfed by the best moments of his own performance, which in turn loses in significance. Complaints about Mr Wolfit's company are not necessarily wrong, but they may be ill-phrased. It is not always the company who are bad, it is at least as often he who is doing something of wider artistic significance that is bound to stand out in any normal assortment of twentieth-century acting. But this could in part be put right by production, especially by a freer use of levels and more studied grouping. Neither he nor we can discover what exactly Mr Wolfit has to give until we get things to scale.

The home of Shakespearian production in England must always be Stratford, even though the Baconians proved the case, I doubt if the tradition so firmly established would be destroyed. Today, it seems probable that Stratford productions are quickly to enjoy a new access of power and prestige, assuredly the new blood, youth, and vitality of the 1946 Festival promises as much. Here, and perhaps here alone, in our western civilization, we have a secular drama attended in a spirit of spontaneous, undefined, unregulated devotion, an atmosphere wherein you cannot properly distinguish holiday excursion from pilgrimage. The Festival is rapidly growing and Stratford likely to become, in a new

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sense, a focus of Anglo-European and Anglo-American culture<sup>1</sup>

Stratford productions compare more than favourably with the West End in vigour and life, but in interpretative detail there are, as elsewhere, slips. During the summer of 1946 I witnessed *Macbeth*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Henry V*, and *Measure for Measure*.

Mr Michael MacOwan's production of *Macbeth* was characterized by some skilful grouping and, especially in Mr Robert Harris, some powerful acting. Success was, however, partial. We need not necessarily quarrel with the Jacobean costuming, nor with the rather too emphatic domesticity and courtliness of the general scheme. *Macbeth* is, very largely, an indoor, domestic, play, it is also, or may be considered, a play of courtliness and costume – up to a point. But these effects must be balanced against others weird and elemental, and here, as so often, there was a lack. Professional performances of *Macbeth* always do, and always will, want conviction whilst the supernatural is given as a series of spooky effects that would shame a children's pantomime. Such failures develop from a society that does not believe in the supernatural, but a society that cannot, at least temporarily, believe in – more, thrill to – the supernatural should avoid *Macbeth*. *Love's Labour's Lost* is a difficult play. Mr Peter Brook's production was clever but over-elaborate. The use of an indoor setting for the King scenes was, especially in the lovers' unmasking, a risky choice. The play is outstanding in Shakespeare for its superabundance of sun-imagery. The details of action, the emotions and poetic imagery, all alike and with one voice demand the correct, parkland, setting. The lovers hide, or

<sup>1</sup> It occurs to me that the strain on Stratford, likely to become unbearable, might be eventually relieved by a Byron Festival, enrolling plays by both seventeenth century and romantic poets, and with translations of Corneille, Racine, Goethe, Alfieri, and Calderon. Byron is himself a dramatist of the first order and his name sufficiently covers such a varied repertoire.

should hide, among bushes or trees. The setting used was a serious impediment to some spritely acting, and here I must note the exceptionally fine rendering, by Mr David King-Wood, of Biron's long speech on love. For the rest, the King of Navarre was costumed with no attempt at dignity. Costard, a rough country fellow, was dressed as a pierrot, and the part performed so as to discount seriously its characterizing humour. However, the most important switch from gaiety to gloom at the close was correctly and sensitively underlined. One more suggestion. The play depends on word-juggling. Big words are there to be understood if possible, but to be amused at anyway. The producer recognized the difficulty of getting a modern audience, untrained in the necessary scholarship and verbal interest, to respond, and hence certain important speeches were gabbled, or interrupted by disconcerting business. No. Where such a difficulty occurs, there is only one hope, to make a special point of the thing you feared (as with the dead bodies in *Hamlet*). Let that sound principle stand here, as always, inviolate. The words can be made passably funny to anyone, with good enough speaking.

Miss Dorothy Green's *Henry V* was a straight-forward and extremely pleasing production. It was, moreover, interpretatively sound. Shakespeare shone through the performance. The settings, which owed something to the Olivier film, were graceful, the French King as a study in morbid unease was admirably conceived and performed. The reverential pause during the count of British dead and the solemn movement of armed soldiers that followed – and what a treat to see fine armour well-used – at the chanting of the Te Deum, the comedy, especially the quite admirable Fluellen of Mr Dudley Jones, perhaps as good as that of Mr Stanley Lathbury before the war – all was in the spirit of Shakespeare's play. I have only two, similar, criticisms. Mr Robert Harris' Chorus, though an excellent performance, might, surely, have been given a grand, rousing, fiery manner, a declamatory manner. It was in-

timate, conversational, confidential almost, following Mr Leslie Banks' Chorus in the film. There it did not matter, but here one wished that Mr Harris could have used his fine voice and equally fine stage presence and poise, with greater freedom. His failure to do this was the stranger as I remember Miss Dorothy Green herself as a remarkable Chorus in the other manner. My other complaints are similar. Neither the 'Once more unto the breach' nor the Crispin speech was given correctly.

Both were spoken intimately, with chatty and haphazard turns to the listeners, and no sense of their peculiar structures. The first was well set on a fore-stage with different levels, but these levels were not used. Henry should have maintained a position of greater power, one foot on a step perhaps, his body facing the town but his head turned to his followers: then let it ring out, holding something in reserve for the second wave (all such speeches in Shakespeare gather volume as they proceed). Mr Paul Scofield, a young actor of considerable promise, has not yet the vocal control for such a speech. But his conception was at fault. So, too, with the more subtle 'Crispin' speech. This is my reading. The King is hampered by his followers' fears. Can he hold them? He starts weakly, repeating himself, searching for a direction. The start can be colloquial, or weakly rhetorical. He is turning over papers – or someone brings him a scroll – his eye catches a word. The Feast of Crispian. The word registers. 'This day is called the feast of Crispian.' Its sound delicately touching, yet just missing, the word Christian exactly corresponds to the chivalric heroism in question. Henry now has the required note, he is newly inspired, quickly the flame spreads, in his words, in his followers' response. He enlists his listeners' deepest selves, awakes their spontaneous desire for heroic renown. Eternity swims into the purview, yet humour is present too, the ring of English names is pure, marvellous, rhetoric. The thing unfolds, gathers height and power, towers up like a cobra. During it the King sees his success, you watch his

listeners change, he is working on them, as surely as Antony in the Forum, the victory is enacted. Notice how, laying a basis in a sound realism, in earth, the speech flowers, it unfolds by stages, it accumulates, gathering mass, an organic, structural whole. This is something no study will reveal, it is something one must learn, arduously, by many renderings.

Lastly, we had Mr Frank McMullan's *Measure for Measure*. As a piece of producing – if producing can be considered as a separate art apart from interpretation – it was admirable. It moved with a fine pace, brisk and entertaining, the use of small stylized screen sets, central, left the stage free for action, and established a pleasing unity. They all, as it were, belonged. One would naturally expect something good, some feeling for the theatre, slightly different from, perhaps better than, that to which we are accustomed, from an American producer, and here it was. But – and the but is important – we did not have Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*.

The pace itself, the emphatically light, stepping, movement contradicted that weighty, measured, deliberate motion suggested by the title, fulfilled by the action and reaching crystallization in the Duke's soliloquy

He who the sword of Heaven would bear  
Should be as holy as severe

Can those rhythms be spoken lightly? No. Indeed, Duke Vincentio was misconceived and miscast. He is, surely, a scholarly recluse, Lucio's 'old fantastical (imaginative) duke of dark corners', a study set between Hamlet and Prospero, whose depth of psychological insight appears to render the execution of justice repellent.<sup>1</sup> Here we had instead a gay young spark with a perpetual smile, a dandy touching up his face in a mirror, a practical joker enjoying

<sup>1</sup> I am following my own interpretation as given in *The Wheel of Fire*, but on these basic matters there is scarcely room for divergence of opinion.



himself mightily. The performance, on these lines, was so good that one temporarily accepted it, but the play was thrown out of joint. Moreover, the Duke was balanced against an Angelo of depth and dignity, an older man, with a thoughtful face and a beard. Now a stage beard has a precise effect, unless deliberately arranged for a character study, it tends to suggest a convincing spiritual dignity, whereas with Angelo we want a pale, precise, would-be ascetic, with some suggestion of weakness. Moreover, the trick played on Angelo's sexual instincts, if arranged by a young man on one many years his senior, is in bad taste, it jars. But this is all wrong. It is inflicted by a man of age, wisdom, and sanctity (note the Duke's disguise as a monk and Angelo's reference to 'power divine') on a comparatively weak tyro in matters spiritual, an amateur. The two parts were miscast. Mr Robert Harris should clearly have been our protagonist, the Duke, and Mr David King-Wood, Angelo. As Angelo, Mr Harris' personality was wrong, and the beard made it worse. Moreover, his Isabella was not the icy fanatic one expects, but rather a figure of luxuriant charm. Her brutal denunciation of Claudio, rising from the depths of her inhibited, repressed soul — the key to her character and the whole play's thesis — was shirked, being given through sobs as distracted, meaningless phrases. Angelo's tragedy is the ironic enthralling of an ascetic by the charms of an opposite asceticism.

Oh cunning enemy that, to catch a saint,  
With saints dost bait thy hook

To make him, a figure of bearded dignity, fall before a girl of normal feminine appeal, is a serious misinterpretation.

As a piece of production, this was, technically, as good a piece of work as one is likely to see. It failed where others fail, attempting

To draw with idle spider's strings  
Most ponderous and substantial things

That is, it failed in the matters of (1) supernatural or semi-supernatural feeling (the Duke as a cowed and ghostly figure), and (2) psychological understanding, recognition of the Shakespearian depth, the twilight world of unconscious instinct on which this play concentrates

It does, indeed, seem that our producers and actors do not naturally breathe the Dionysian air of Shakespearian tragedy. It is not that they cannot technically do what is required, but that, in the depths, they do not wish to

Look, what I will not, that I cannot do

The tendencies I am opposing, which are precisely analogous to those tendencies of Shakespearian scholarship which I have opposed now for twenty years in my more academic studies, remain pervasive, hampering the most sumptuous efforts of our professional stage

But, where lighter substances are involved, our best acting and production may be excellent. What could be finer than a Gielgud Barrie, Wilde, Tchekhov or Congreve? A good recent example was Mr John Clements' *Marriage à la Mode*. Dryden's heroic, or semi-heroic, plays are not deeply important. This is itself, to a serious study, a disturbing work, if only because the two plots do not, and cannot, cohere, half is of St James's Park in the Restoration era, the other half is Arcadia, and no attempt at interrelation is made, or indeed conceivable, since, in a world where the absurdity of the marriage bond is taken for granted, delight in youthful romance remains impossible. The incompatibility is thus final. Even within the comic plot itself the cynical convention kills drama, since without belief in marital fidelity as a social norm the attempts at dramatic discovery on which the comic action – as apart from verbal wit – depends, lose point. Notice, on the contrary, how the comedy of the Screen scene in *The School for Scandal* grows entirely from our serious sympathy with old Sir Peter. Comedy to be truly satisfying must have a serious background. Dryden here, as elsewhere, lacks that centrality,

that romantic or metaphysical core, for whose recognition on our stage my essay pleads. It is accordingly significant that Mr Clements' production reached a standard of excellence outdistancing all our Shakespearian results. The nature of that excellence is worth defining.

The play may be a hotch-potch, but the production wasn't. Its very discrepancies forced a light, fantastic manner that fused the whole. There was a unity of treatment, more, a unity of conventional technique. The producer knew exactly how to enlist his audience's belief. Light music was used for stately entrances, these being given artistic poise without grandeur, the tyrant striding and his soldiers stepping to quick time. Where arrests were wanted, his soldiers crossed spears in front of the arrested person, formally, in stylized fashion, but sharply, and as sharply removed them when necessary. Everything went with a click, with precision, with perfect timing. Moreover, when the difficult political reversals and fights occur, the convention was used to turn potential ridicule against itself. Two gentlemen - no more - took on two soldiers and played at parry and thrust to quick music, at the exact time arranged, synchronizing with the music, each gentleman disarmed his opponent, tossing his sword in air and catching it, turned sharply up-stage, marched to the new king, knelt, and together handed him the swords of the vanquished. All was done in perfect obedience to the laws imposed by the chosen convention, the fight was deliberately taken only half-seriously, and as a result it was more seriously effective than most Shakespearian fight-scenes. It is not suggested that this particular convention should be applied to Shakespeare's battle-scenes, but rather that we have not found, or created, the appropriate convention for them in our century. Indeed, producers nowadays tend to suppress any actual fighting, admitting defeat.

The producer knew his play, not just the plot, but the play as a living medium built by himself and his audience. He was aware of its inmost nature, particularly its defects,

and was anxious to help the author out. As a result, Dryden's play was better entertainment than Shakespeare is today or is in the near future likely to be. Probably such works as those of Aeschylus or Shakespeare cannot properly be called entertaining. Nor is it only a question of a light manner, quick music, pretty settings and so on, that did so much to make this production an afternoon's pleasure. Even Dryden's love-couplets, as spoken by a young actor (Mr David Pecl) of youthful vigour (vigour rather than grace) and vocal charm, were, on a first hearing (I had read the play only once) probably more poetically effective than would be Romeo's blank-verse under similar conditions. I have myself found more satisfaction, as an actor, in speaking Rostand's lines (in a rhymed couplet translation) in *Les Fantastiques* than one readily receives in trying to do justice to Shakespeare's love poetry. Indeed, in any poetry, judgments must be diverse according to whether we judge it as literature to be read or as verse to be spoken. Dryden's couplets were an exquisite, if naive, delight.

True, if someone had got up and started 'The quality of mercy is not strained' or something of similar calibre, the whole edifice would have come crashing about our ears. But, fortunately, nothing of the sort occurred.

## 4

A Shakespearian play is packed with emotional and intellectual meanings far in excess of anyone's reception within a three hours' performance, and yet only at one's peril does one accept the impossibility. The difficulties appear to exceed those of music. We are nearer the intractable substances of actual life, and yet of these heavy substances we demand a result as delicate, as spiritual, as Coleridge's 'dome in air' or the music-palace in *Abt Vogler*. Speaking is surely a subtler art than music. Could the intonations, modulations, tragic intensity, romantic appeal of a voice be given the notation of a musical score? True, they can be

recorded on a gramophone, it is a question of degree, but the difference remains. The vibrations of the human voice are much faster than those of music, and yet in speaking one must rely on an organism comparatively jejune, rough, unfinished, and uncertain. Nor, if one's voice is off colour, can one start turning screws to tighten the relaxed chords. Nervousness, irritability, a cold in the head, all affect one's utterance immediately. It is not my concern to prove that the one art is greater than the other, merely to suggest that success in the one is far harder of attainment. Music, though a highly transcendental art, offers an artificial, mathematical, simplified, connotation of that transcendental world, whereas the spoken word, being in closest contact with the mystery of the actual, conditioned equally by its subtleties and intractabilities, faces an infinity of problems unknown to music. Great music may well represent the 'highest reaches of a human wit', but a great play challenges God's human creation in all its insufficiency and glory.<sup>1</sup>

As for movement, the actor's body should be as subtle as the athlete's, but there again, whereas the expert athlete in his own chosen line has a comparatively simple job, of tossing, say, a golf-ball into a distant hole, the actor's body has to be so nervously adaptable that it can, by the poise of the head or the move of a hand, express the half-conscious thoughts swirling below that golfer's mind whilst he makes his swing. The producer is in the position of a master chess-player, but he has a yet harder, because less clear-cut and understood objective. Moreover, the chess-master enjoys a tyrannic control unknown to the producer, he puts his pieces where he wants and when he wants, he knows

1 Each of the criticisms made in this essay is based on a single performance, and accordingly risks a serious injustice. I saw Sir Laurence Olivier's *Lear* on the third night. His make up was poorly adjusted to the lighting. Probably it was improved later on. Who can say how much difference such an improvement might have made in my response? The pitfalls, for actor and critic alike, are infinite in number.

exactly what they are and what they can do, they are not liable to nervousness, irritability, egotism. His queen is never temperamental and his king doesn't murmur when casting puts him in the corner. In production one is forging an art out of living persons with human virtues and vices, and those virtues and vices themselves must be faced and used, pride must be pandered to, nervousness handled with tact, criticism of the producer met by enlisting sympathy in good time. Even if all goes well, the properly emotional qualities of great drama – and it is with these that we are here concerned – touch so intimately those of the audience that success is rare. Hence one returns from a performance critical of Romeo, but full of praise for Mercutio or Tybalt, delighted with Iago or Enobarbus, but critical of Othello, of Antony. No one will fully approve of Hamlet, so much the subjective self of each of us. At every point, whether in consideration of speaking or acting, production, or response, something very personal, very intimate, is concerned. Cool reason plays but a small part, instead, jealousies, antagonisms, prejudice, exhibitionism – the theatre is full of them – indeed, made of them. They are its stuff. It is these that must be rendered malleable, these that must finally be transmuted by the producer into the delicate translucencies of art.

Such, then, is the battle-ground of the professional or amateur actor and producer. It has been remarked that school-boys act Shakespeare more pleasingly than the professionals. True, boys or university students may often show an unspoilt freshness rarely found on the professional stage, and for such virtues one will forgive many inadequacies. It is also true that a first-class amateur, with his three to six nights' performance, is likely enough to give us moments of intellectual intensity the professional seldom provides. Why? Because the professional is trained to produce effects of a certain standard at all times and places, in big theatres, before various audiences friendly and hostile, in good or bad health alike, and for a long and tedious

succession of performances. All this forces a cast-iron technique, and this technique is bought at a cost. He must rely on voice-production of as perfect a kind as possible, which is, paradoxically, by no means necessarily the most transfixing kind. Certainly, the more he fights against all this, the better, and well it would be, too, for the critical amateur to realize that, if suddenly inserted into the run of a full-scale professional production, his favour might quickly find itself cooling. The inadequacies of the average amateur, his mumbled words and muffled action, need no advertisement. But if there be some necessary lack also in the very nature of professional acting, then, all the more, the responsibility rests with the producer, for he has resources at his command far outweighing those available to the little theatre, and these resources are not used.

Where production is the argument, my criticisms are, and will remain, uncompromising. It is, however, something of an invidious and bitter task to write critically of any actor. In no art is the cruelty of unjust, unsympathetic criticism more wicked. No one can see himself acting, no one can hear his stage voice, not merely his art, but his own most intimate centres of personal and physical consciousness are under judgment. It is therefore with some diffidence that these remarks are offered, for what they may be worth. This essay is no attack against the professional actor, nor the star system. The star system is written indelibly into Greek and Shakespearian tragedy alike, and the personal influence and following possessed by such men as Gielgud, Olivier, and Wolfit today is surely our best sign of health, outside Stratford-on-Avon, in the professional theatre.

## APPENDIX

### DRAMA AND THE UNIVERSITY

*Reprinted from the University of Leeds Review (June, 1919)*

URELY there never was an age when drama was so popular. I very community to-day has, or desires to have, its dramatic group. Little theatres are busy across the globe. The position, status and future of the professional stage are uncertain, but, both there and with the amateurs, the demand, the instinct, the craving, all are evident. In this movement the Leeds University Union Theatre Group, under the presidency of Prof. Bonamy Dobson, has for some time held an honourable place.

There is much talk to-day, throughout our universities, of possible Drama Departments in the future. A Department of Drama, under the direction of Mr. F. Tagg, is already in being in the University of Bristol. Of academic policy in general I do not feel competent to speak, but a word or two may be offered from my own dramatic experience.

A Drama Department would be very different from a Drama Group. Its standard of production would, probably, be lower. The Group draws on the whole University—engaging prospective clergymen, doctors, lawyers, businessmen, university lecturers and school teachers, much, indeed. A Drama Department would contain mostly those who are putting stage interests in the forefront, which is no guarantee whatsoever of stage ability, besides others who merely select drama as an amusing alternative to duller studies. The two bodies would remain distinct, but the centre of gravity would inevitably pass from the Group to the Department with a certain loss. At the best there would be a division of talent and a lowering of standard.

There are other difficulties. What, exactly, would this Department do? It is generally asserted that a university Drama Department should not compete with the professional dramatic schools. It will not aim at turning out professional actors or producers, but at equipping prospective teachers with some intellectual knowledge and some rudimentary practice. It will, it would seem, be forced to set a comparatively low standard, while encouraging a superficial intellectualized knowledge of an art not *directly* intellectual, and leaving those who have graduated with success to think themselves equipped before the realities have been surveyed. There is point in a literary drama course, there is point too in a professional school of dramatic art, but the precise purpose and value of a Drama Department need careful scrutiny. A merely, or mainly, external knowledge of dramatic art, without, that is, a pri-



mary emphasis on non intellectual, personal, and active experience, might do more harm than good

Not only might it encourage a groundless self confidence, more, the too academic approach might well sterilize the dramatic instinct of its pupils. There would appear to me no greater disservice to the young enthusiast than to set any primary emphasis on stage archæology, with attempted resurrections of past styles in acting or production. It is hard enough to be true to ourselves, and more profitable. Academic learning is, in essence, a knowing, drama, on every level (as the name implies) a doing, and the knowing can very easily hamper the doing. Compare the extreme statement of E. Gordon Craig 'For actors need not be sent to schools and colleges. Education, valuable to most men, is, more often than not, quite fatal to an actor, the one thing to preserve being the child in him' (*Ellen Terry and her Secret Self*, p. 79).

It may be argued that the same objections apply to a school of theology or literature. It remains none the less true that the gifted aspirant would inevitably turn his attention away from the Drama Department to the Drama Group. For there he finds a living theatre at work and demanding his co-operation. The one will teach him *about* drama, but this is drama itself.

The professional schools have their own dangers — the danger pre-eminently of an external technique — but with these I am not here concerned. For universities, the danger is that the academic tradition, which must necessarily put a premium on knowledge and memory, should crush the dramatic impulse by learning, or, at the best, should water down the strong wine of dramatic art to a mental and conceptual level, reducing it, by criticism, to a dead level of mediocrity. The essential showiness, if you like the vulgarity, of the actor's art must be guaranteed. Our age is one of poor dramatic understanding, but great dramatic interest. We feel the theatre has something for us, but we fear this very 'something', we love drama, but remain in terror of the dramatic. It is a pity, for the noblest dramatic art must always be steadied on a firm basis of overstatement, over emphasis and exaggerated action, only so can one equip oneself for the greater roles and free one's powers for rhetoric and subtlety alike.

'Over acting' is a dangerous misnomer. There is good acting and there is bad acting. Bad acting, if at all powerful, will be found putting the emphasis at the wrong place, finding a climax where climax exists, like the over-swinging of a golf tyre violently sweeping air and merely tapping the ball. Good acting hits the ball much — but it is the ball that it hits.

And yet the actor does not express an ordinary emotion. He expresses an artistic, a stage, emotion. One often finds to day a fear of 'acting' together with a faulty exhibition of raw, personal feeling. Stage-work a stage speaking must be developed, almost you might

certain vocal convention mastered, within which a whole gamut of emotional and intellectual themes can be rendered without strain. It is not merely noise and ranting that we distrust: these can be left to the tender mercies of any audience. The danger is more subtle: we fear stage speaking itself, with all its varied virtuosity of pause and climax, its calculated emotional effects, its colour and resonance. We are morbidly afraid of anything 'old style' in voice or gesture: all grandeur is taboo. We are far too contented with our own impoverished period, and the result in reading or performance, on the BBC and elsewhere, remains - what it is.

The actor does not merely imitate, he recreates, from the depths within, a new and strangely variable personality. He is not just disguising his ordinary self, he is always making, or discovering, a new self. He is continually, in religious phraseology, being 'born again'. In *The Good Companions* J. B. Priestley has an interesting passage on dramatic art:

It was very odd and amusing seeing her new friends on the stage. She had never known any professionals before, and it was quite different from watching amateurs. When you saw people you knew acting with amateur dramatic societies, they were merely themselves with parts stuck on to them. But with these professionals, you lost sight of the private personalities, they simply came to life on the stage in another sort of way, and as you watched them, you could hardly believe that you really knew them as people. Jimmy Nunn, for example, was all drollery, he had an entirely new voice, very queer and squeaky. (II, 11)

Precisely the same happens, or should happen, in other types of acting, though the voices, the personalities, recreated will vary according to the part or type of drama in question. An actor's stage speaking may well show a tonal difference from his normal speech, as though mined from some deeper level within the personality, whose rough but glittering quartz wants to be wrought into vocal, or other, artistry. Some people are born with a 'golden voice', others by labour develop what is given them. Too good a natural voice may certainly prove dangerous, while to take conscious pleasure in one's own speaking is always fatal. Many a professional Shakespearean actor remains content with the voice and a few stock variations, without attuning it to every shade of the required emotion and splitting it into the variegated tints of meaning. The golden voice then becomes an overdose of treacle. Such an actor is at the best a painter of the same picture. But for most amateurs, and many movie professionals, the danger is the reverse. The film technique of the red asides is vitiated our judgments.

When we were asked what should be the primary emphases in any drama, I should suggest, first, dramatic reading, and, second, a training in body-movement, but both in closest relation to actual drama or poetry.

The reading need not be confined to drama. Indeed, I should like, the reading, with full dramatic variation and closest intellectual, emotional interpretation, of certain chosen poems, preferably such as, out of fashion to day, poems that demand a wide range of vocal color. Byron, or Tennyson, Donne and Hopkins are clearly, for our generation, less valuable tests.<sup>1</sup> To day we read most brilliantly with the eye and the intellect, but fear the weightier powers of vocal music. The breaking down of vocal reserve, vocal inhibitions, is more than a technique; it is an initiation, an entry into the heart of poetry or drama. It is discovery and a self-revelation of primary importance. The constant struggle for yet more and more exact interpretation which is quite a different matter from simple reading, being less a reflection than a creation, causes one to possess the poem in a new way rather as one possesses a play after producing it. This is to day in art that awaits self-conscious development beyond anything in the past. Something can certainly be taught, and the rest will not taught encourage itself.

When we consider how many of our university students may be expected to imitate, year after year, the reading of sacred scriptures, literary masterpieces on others, we may suggest that there could be to day no more important act in the educational world than the inauguration of such a training, with all the advantages which it makes of records — and without these no one can hear his own voice now at our disposal. Indeed, all the arts of the actor have here a high general value. The life work of many a clerical student in lectures, a teacher would have been twice or more — a powerful and he learns in youth something of the repose, the gesture, and the infectious propensity to dramatic art.

There are two main deficiencies in our twentieth century actors. One is the inability, or lack of desire, to use the full periscope of the voice, confining its tones to a monotonous grey, and missing therefore not only the rhetoric and emotional song of great drama, but, since all depends on relation and contrast, the relief of the colloquial too. The colloquial and humorous touches in Donne and Eliot go for nothing if not justly balanced against the incantation.

The other limitation is the continuing of acting to be only and hence. True acting must search for expression throughout the body, and he the *Comédie Française*, to judge from their performance of *Phèdre* in London in 1945, have developed a technique in advance of our own performers. This is why Limon is so interesting a part and why his play has been, on the whole, so strangely ignored. The first act demands the acting. Indeed, a true understanding of *Limon of Athens* might point the path to a new extension in dramatic art, using the body more fully.

1 I would here pay a tribute to the excellence of Mr. John Gielgud's recent rendering of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*.

